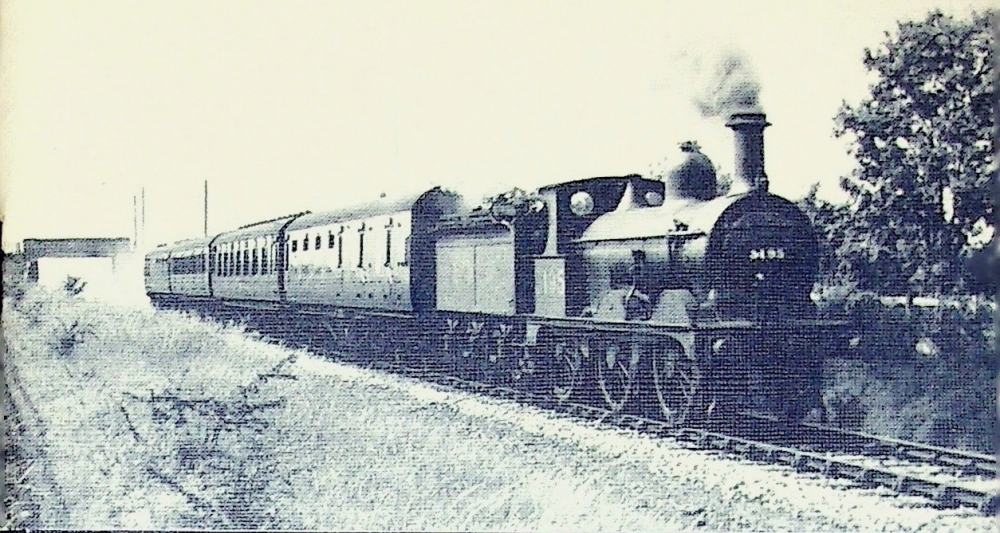




THE KETTERING— HUNTINGDON LINE

John Rhodes

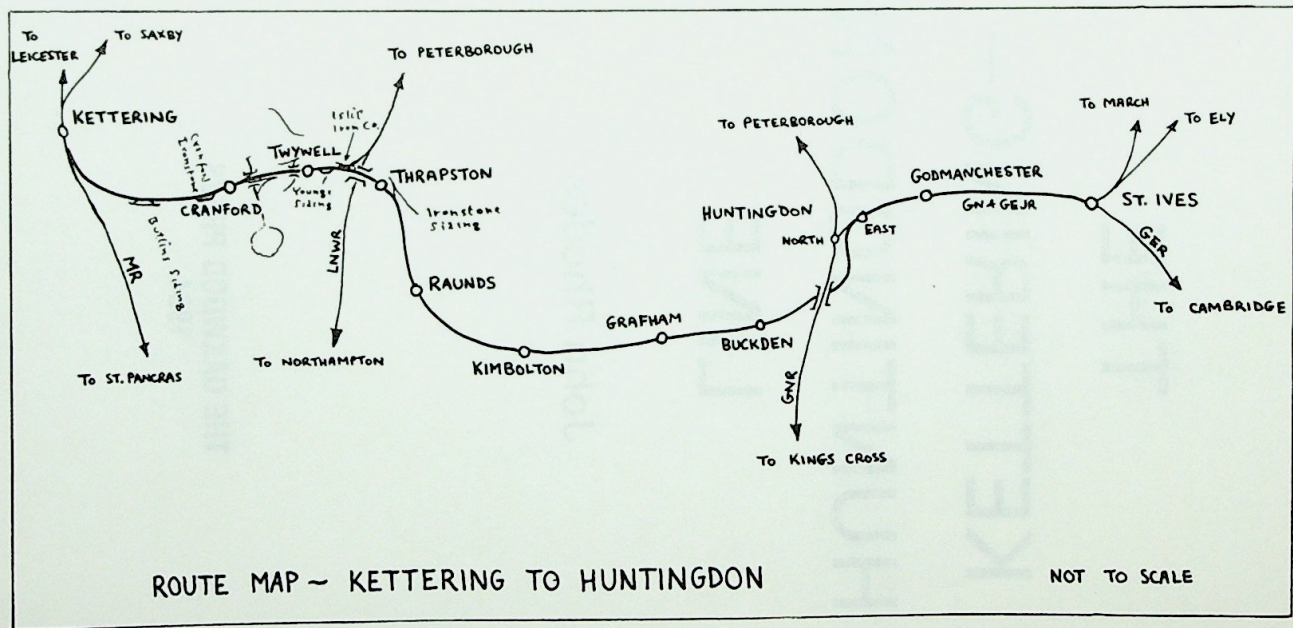
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John Rhodes

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ROUTE MAP ~ KETTERING TO HUNTINGDON

NOT TO SCALE

Chapter One

CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING

The Kettering to Huntingdon cross-country branch line was opened for passenger traffic on 1st March 1866, but schemes and counter-schemes for railways through the area had been intermittently proposed, abandoned and re-proposed over the previous thirty years. In 1836, when railways were still relatively new, and the country was wide open for development in most directions, the Midland Counties Railway produced a plan to link the Nottinghamshire coalfields to the London & Birmingham main line at Rugby (a route then under construction) by a branch through Leicester, a substantial manufacturing centre which could be expected to provide considerable traffic. But this was a time before the large companies which were to dominate railway development after 1850 had become established, and when hosts of small concerns sprang up in open and fierce competition; accordingly, a rival proposal, the South Midlands Railway, was immediately put forward as a direct counter to the Midland Counties scheme, also aiming to link Leicester via Market Harborough with the London & Birmingham main line (but this time at Blisworth, south of Rugby) and with an additional branch from Market Harborough to Stamford. Parliamentary favour, however, was eventually given to the first scheme, and the Midland Counties line was opened in 1840.

Nine years passed, and in 1845, at the height of the Railway Mania, the South Midlands scheme was revived, in a more ambitious form, again as a deliberate challenge to a rival line. This time the proposal had the support of the Midland Counties Railway, now absorbed into the Midland Railway, and under the energetic and unscrupulous ownership of George Hudson, and was aimed at providing opposition and competition to the proposed London & York Railway, which eventually became the Great Northern main line. In an attempt to attract as much traffic as possible away from his rival, Hudson gave backing not only to the revival of the Leicester–Blisworth route, but also to additional routes from Market Harborough to Bedford via Kettering, and from Kettering to Huntingdon, the first time a line between these two towns had been proposed. Some complicated Parliamentary and legal manoeuvres followed, the outcome being an inevitable compromise, with the Midland Railway being allowed to build its Leicester–Bedford line, with a link with the Great Northern at Hitchin, on condition that it dropped all support for the South Midland scheme. Thus for a second time a number of useful branch lines were lost, including the Kettering–Huntingdon link.

By 1860, the main north–south routes of the G.N., M.R. and L.N.W.R. had been established, and the G.E. had a virtual monopoly of

the eastern counties. Railway companies therefore began to turn their attention to cross-country lines, linking the main lines rather like the rungs of a ladder. The L.&B. Railway's branch into Peterborough in 1845 had been an early example of this, and for long had provided a useful link between the Midland manufacturing districts and the east coast, running eastwards from Peterborough over G.E. metals. There was, however, a need for a shorter, more direct route between these two areas, and it was this need that the Kettering–Huntingdon line was promoted to fulfil, this time not as a counter to any other scheme, but as a project valid in itself.

The scheme was to be presented in two stages, and as a first move the Kettering and Thrapstone Railway Company was formed in 1861, with William Dalrymple as Secretary, Hoddings, Townsend & Lee as solicitors, and George Barclay Bruce and James Brunlees as engineers. The Company offices were at 6 Bridge Street, Westminster. Capital required was £80,000, to be raised by 4,000 £20 shares (later altered to 8,000 £10 shares). (Thrapstone was the original spelling of what later became Thrapston. The final 'e' was still on headed Company notepaper in October 1864, but had been dropped by the beginning of 1866. It still persists in some private correspondence after this date, but ceased to be officially printed).

The Company's official Prospectus, issued in 1862, first sets out the reasons for the line's promotion, and makes clear that Thrapston is not the ultimate destination of the branch, but merely a convenient intermediate station on the eventual route to Huntingdon:

“... a large tract of country in Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire has no means of communication by Railway in an easterly or westerly direction with the ports on the sea coast on one side, and the manufacturing midland districts on the other, without traversing a very circuitous route either by way of Peterborough or Northampton.

“This Railway has been projected with a view to meeting this want, and is the first link in a line which, leaving the Midland Railway at Kettering and passing through or near to Thrapstone, Raunds, and Kimbolton, will communicate with the Great Northern and Eastern Counties system of Railway at Huntingdon.”

Acting, as it would, as a link between the Midlands and the east coast, there would obviously be mutual benefit to the projected Company and the already existing railways in the type of traffic that the line would carry:

“The quantity of Agricultural Produce raised in the district which the line passes through is very large, and the natural markets for this produce are the consuming manufacturing districts, with which this Railway would bring it into direct communication. The main want of the district is Coal for the burning of Lime, which would also find its way from the Midland Counties by this Railway. The line for which an

Act of Parliament is now being sought, between Kettering and Thrapstone, passes through a district rich in Iron Ore, as yet unworked for want of Railway communication, which it is now proposed to provide."

It was not, in fact, strictly true that the iron ore of the district had not yet been worked because of the lack of rail transport, since Midland Railway trains had since 1857 been carrying large quantities of iron from furnaces opened in Wellingborough four years earlier by Thomas Butlin, but there were certainly very extensive deposits of ore still to be worked, including the area around Woodford, near Thrapston, where General Arbuthnot, one of the line's first directors, had a large estate from which samples of iron ore had been sent to be displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The Prospectus ended by stating that the Midland Railway, "with which this Railway would have more direct interchange of traffic than any other", had agreed to provide rolling stock and to work the line "for a percentage of receipts highly favourable to the interests of this Company", and thus, assured of influential backing, the promoters optimistically forecast that anyone purchasing shares could expect to see a return of at least five per cent on their capital. As final reassurance of the stability of the project (a necessary consideration at a time when so many railway schemes foundered after running into unexpectedly heavy construction costs) the Secretary reminded his readers that there should be no such inflation of costs on this line: "The Engineering features of the line are of the lightest character, and the purchase of the land has for the most part been arranged at agricultural prices."

At the same time as the Prospectus was being put together, there was hectic activity among the Company members to obtain support for the scheme from those people who would have most influence over whether the line came into existence or not—the large landowners of the area, over whose territory the railway would have to run. Most important of these was William Drogo, 7th Duke of Manchester, whose country seat was at Kimbolton Castle, mid-way between Thrapston and Huntingdon. The Duke had inherited his title in 1855 on the death of his father George, who had supplemented the many acres of land he already owned in Huntingdonshire and Northamptonshire by his marriage in 1822 to Millicent, daughter and heiress of Brigadier-General Robert Bernard Sparrow of Brampton Park, who had extensive property in the parishes of Godmanchester, Brampton, Grafham and Easton. In February 1862 William Dalrymple, Secretary of the Kettering & Thrapstone Company, wrote to the Duke's secretary, Valentine Hill (a character who was to figure prominently in the future development of the railway) politely asking if the Company could rely on the Duke's support for its scheme, casually mentioning, as an incentive to this support, that several other influential people in the district, such as Lord Burghley of Stamford, Lord

Overstone of Overstone Hall near Northampton, and General Arbuthnot of Woodford, had already given their backing; in addition, said Dalrymple, the Duke of Buccleuch, who owned Boughton House near Kettering, was "very favourable" and expressed himself "much interested" in the project's progress.

This appeal to aristocratic solidarity obviously worked, since no opposition was raised to any aspect of the scheme, and Parliamentary progress was therefore remarkably smooth (certainly in an age when some Bills had spectacularly stormy passages, resulting sometimes in total shipwreck and abandonment), the Bill being given Royal assent on 29th July 1862.

The Act provided for five directors of the Company to be elected, to qualify by possession of £300 worth of shares or stock. The Company's capital of £80,000 could be supplemented if necessary by borrowing on mortgage a sum not in excess of £26,600. The limits of the railway were clearly defined by the Act: "Railway shall commence in the parish of Kettering, in the county of Northampton, by a junction with the Leicester and Hitchin Railway of the Midland Railway Company, and shall terminate in the parish of Thrapstone, in the county of Northampton, in a field abutting on the west side of the Northampton and Peterborough Railway of the London and North Western Railway Company."

The Kettering & Thrapstone Railway Company were to be responsible for the connection with the Midland Railway at Kettering Junction, and for the cost of any signalling involved, although the Midland Railway would actually install this themselves. A list of rates for carriage of various commodities gives some idea of the sort of traffic expected over the line:

Compost, limestone, salt roadstone	1d per ton per mile
Sugar, grain, corn, timber	2d "
Coal, coke, building material, iron	1½d "
Cotton, fish, manufactured goods	3d "
Private carriages	4d per mile
Horses	3d "
Cattle	2d "
Pigs	½d "
Sheep	¼d "
Passengers	2d "

Even as work began on the newly-authorised railway, arrangements were being made to petition Parliament for permission to extend the line from Thrapston to Huntingdon, to link with the Eastern Counties Railway branch from Godmanchester to St. Ives (opened in 1847), which with approved running powers would make possible a through route to Cambridge and the eastern counties. In accordance with Standing Orders, notice of intention was published in the local newspaper; plans, sections and books of reference were deposited with the Clerks of the Peace in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire by the end of

November 1862; and once again the task of wooing support from landowners likely to be affected by the route of the line was undertaken. To each was sent the standard letter of application, requesting a statement of the landowner's attitude:

"We beg to inform you that application is intended to be made to Parliament in the ensuing session for an Act to enable the Kettering and Thrapstone Railway Company to extend their authorised line of Railway to Huntingdon, with a Branch Railway at Huntingdon (the short link between the new line and the Great Northern's station at Huntingdon) and for other purposes; and that property mentioned in the annexed Schedule, or some part thereof, in which we understand you are interested as therein stated, will be required for the purposes of the said undertaking . . . As we are required to report to Parliament whether you assent to or dissent from the proposed undertaking, or whether you are neuter in respect thereto, you will oblige us by writing your answer of assent, dissent, or neutrality in the form left therewith, and returning the same to us with your signature, on or before the 20th day of December instant . . ."

Much of the land concerned was, in fact, owned either by the Duke of Manchester or Lady Olivia Bernard Sparrow, both of whom had already supported the line in its earlier stages; little opposition, if any, could therefore be expected at this point from other sources, and once again there was a rapid progress through Parliament to final authorisation on 28th July 1863, almost exactly a year after the completion of the first Bill.

As well as allowing the K.T.&H.R. to use "certain stations and portions of Railway of the Great Eastern Railway Company and the Great Northern Railway Company", this second Act also contained provision for the new line to cross public roads on the level at Longstow, Easton and Graffham, with the warning that "It shall not be lawful for the Company, in shunting trains, to pass any train over the level crossing, or to allow any train, engine, carriage, or truck to stand across the same." The Company were to erect "lodges", staffed by gate-keepers, at each crossing. The Midland Railway was to work the line in exchange for 40% of the gross receipts for the first seven years, and 50% thereafter.

Although the cost of most of the land for the Kettering-Thrapston section had been reported as being at "agricultural prices", the cost for the extension to Huntingdon seems to have been rather higher. Exact prices are difficult to obtain, but in early 1863, for example, Lord Sandwich, in correspondence with the Company, was quoting £60-£100 per acre generally, although there were certain areas (such as grassland near Buckden and Huntingdon) which were exceptionally valuable, and could fetch as much as £300 per acre.

The main contractors for the line were Messrs Waring Brothers, a well-known and well-established concern which had previously undertaken a

variety of projects over a wide area, such as the Metropolitan District Line, Liverpool Central station and other city lines, and various Scottish routes, including lines through Glasgow. Following the usual practice, various sections of the contract were sub-let to local entrepreneurs, such as Mr W. Parker of Stamford, who secured a contract to build all the stations along the route.

The east-west direction of the line meant that it cut across the prevailing lie of the land, necessitating a steep 1 in 70 incline immediately after the junction with the Kettering main line in order to climb to the top of the ridge which separated the valleys of the River Isle and River Nene. A 5-mile drop on grades varying from 1 in 87 to 1 in 140 brought the line into the Nene valley, whence it climbed steeply again at 1 in 80 for a mile and a half out of Thrapston. The many embankments and cuttings consequent on such a switchback route meant that building progress on the western half of the line was initially rather slow, but by the summer of 1864 construction gangs had completed most of the major work on this difficult section, and by the early months of the next year, 1865, it was being confidently reported that progress had been so satisfactory that an opening in the autumn of that year could be contemplated. At the half-yearly general meeting of the managers held on 23rd February, for example, the chairman, General Arbuthnot, reported "very considerable progress" over the last six months, so that four-fifths of the work was now complete. The engineer of the K.T.&H.R., George Bruce, was able to reinforce this, indicating that most of the earthworks and masonry along the route were finished; all rails and sleepers were on site, and two miles of track had already been laid; and station buildings were being rapidly proceeded with. The meeting confidently predicted that an opening on 1st August could be expected. Further cheering news was that a boost had been given to the original plans to exploit the iron ore of the area by the excavating of fresh deposits on General Arbuthnot's estate at Woodford, which were said to be "the best yet discovered".

Perhaps a certain amount of haste to finish the line by the summer was responsible for the deaths, in April and July 1865, of two of the workmen employed on digging cuttings along the route. It was a favourite practice of navvies, and one which saved time when loosening large sections of earth, to indulge in what was known as "pecking"; that is, undermining a bank near to its base, thus bringing down eventually a satisfyingly large amount of material with the minimum of effort. This practice was inherently dangerous, since there was no real way of knowing when the earth would collapse, and since the navvies were of necessity working at the base, there was always the risk of being buried by an unexpected fall. On 22 April, 19-year old Jesse Claypole, from Middleton near Corby, working on a cutting near Denford, was caught by such a collapse of clay which, however, did not bury him but threw him backwards onto the railway line at exactly the moment when a ballast train was passing, where

he sustained numerous injuries which proved fatal. At the inquest, the ganger in charge of the section said that workmen had frequently been warned to stop "pecking" while trucks were passing, since the vibration caused was likely to bring down whole slabs of earth.

A similar fatality occurred three months later in West Meadow, Huntingdon, when a 41-year old navy from Sproxtton, Leicestershire, William Pulford, was also buried by a sudden fall of clay while loading some wagons. The rush of earth was so great that the unfortunate man was swept against the wheels of the trucks and was, as a press report graphically stated, "crushed from head to foot". On this occasion, the landslide was attributed not to vibration but to a recent storm which, a couple of weeks earlier, had flooded fields and lanes and left the clay soil dangerously unstable.

In spite of such accidents, progress continued swiftly, although by the beginning of June it was clear that an August opening was not likely after all, mainly because of the protracted business of cutting through the embankment carrying the G.N. main line near Huntingdon, a task requiring some delicacy if it were not to cause disastrous subsidence to the existing railway, along which trains continued to pass with regularity. By the end of August, however, a local newspaper reported that the route was "quite completed, and only awaits Government inspection for opening purposes". The Head of Kimbolton School, the Rev. William Ager M.A., making arrangements for the start of a new term, inserted an advertisement in the "Cambridge Chronicle" to the effect that he would be "ready for his Pupils on Wednesday, October the 11th", and added the encouraging footnote: "N.B.—A Railway Station near the Town".

The optimism of the Board, the shareholders, and the Rev. Ager was however to suffer something of a setback almost immediately: the Board of Trade inspection, expected to be a formality, proved not to be so. The Government Inspector, Captain Rich, was not satisfied with the condition of the line in a number of respects and refused to allow opening until the faults had been rectified. Construction gangs were once again set to work, and toiled away through the winter months; by mid-February 1866 a trial train of four or five carriages ran from Kettering to Huntingdon to test out the repair work, which Captain Rich approved on the 15th; a few days later, on 21st February, the first goods train was in service. With little ceremony, the passenger service came into operation on 1st March, a bitterly cold day whose low temperatures (16 degrees of frost had been recorded overnight) were not enough to prevent local people turning out to watch the trains steam through their new village stations; surveying the gaps in his classroom desks the Headmaster of Thrapston National School recorded ruefully in his Logbook: "New rail opened for passengers—several gone to the station".

The Board of Directors was justifiably pleased at this stage. At the half-yearly meeting held on 26th February, a few days before the passenger

operations began, Secretary Arthur Lankester's report congratulated the Company on the completion of its project, praised the contractors for the "substantial manner" in which the work had been carried out, and held out yet again the promise of good returns on capital with the prospect of a thriving passenger traffic. The cost of the line to date, he reported, had been £305,600 (£288,590 for construction and land purchase, £9,000 for legal and Parliamentary fees, £6,000 for engineering work, and £2,010 for miscellaneous items). There was a disquieting note, however, since although at this same meeting it was agreed that the Secretary's salary should be fixed at £300 pa, the other Directors were apparently unable to be paid for their services until the line started to earn revenue. The passenger services which were expected to bring in some of these receipts were, in themselves, rather sparse at first, with only four trains a day each way, taking 2½ hours for the journey to Cambridge; only two of these trains called at all stations, the other two stopping at Cranford, Thrapston, Kimbolton, Huntingdon and St. Ives only. The Sunday service consisted of just two trains, one in each direction.

Passenger trains had only been running for two days when there occurred the railway's first operational fatality. Matthew Humphrey, a 28-year old platelayer, was walking along the trackside near Godmanchester when he unaccountably stepped into the path of the 8.15 a.m. ex-Kettering train which was overtaking him at about 25 mph. The press report dwelt lovingly on the gory details: "His left thigh was broken and much shattered, the flesh torn and hanging in large masses, and small splinters of bone mixed with the flesh, and otherwise very much bruised."

There were other accidents in these first months also, fortunately without further loss of life. On 17th March a goods train was derailed near the Ouse Bridge at Huntingdon in consequence of a set of points being left wrongly set; and on 3rd July a passenger train with a wagon of coal attached caused a one-hour delay to traffic after it came off the track near Kimbolton station. At the beginning of August an early morning coal train of 15 wagons approaching Buckden lost control on the 1 in 78 incline and, taking a curve near the station too fast, derailed a dozen of its trucks, most of which were badly damaged, one in fact half burying itself in the ground. Track was torn up, rails bent and twisted, and sleepers were splintered for some distance. Damage was estimated at £700. The wreckage was cleared, and the line opened again for traffic, by early afternoon.

Holiday excursions, which were to form a significant proportion of the line's traffic in future years, had become a regular feature of railway travel since Thomas Cook had inaugurated the idea in 1841, and the Kettering-Cambridge service was only a few days old when, at a meeting of a Kettering Temperance Society, it was proposed that all 300 members together with 450 Band of Hope youngsters should take advantage of the new route "to have a cheap railway excursion to the seaside". It was said

that 6d a week saved would amount by August to 10/- per person, "amply sufficient to meet the expenses". I have been unable to find any report of the excursion actually taking place, and it appears that for some reason there was a change of plan, since in July the Band of Hope went to Pavenham Park, Bedfordshire instead, travelling by the Leicester and Hitchin Railway. Perhaps the sixpences were not being saved up as regularly as the organisers expected.

The railway made a more positive contribution in June of the same year, however, after the notorious Welwyn Tunnel accident in which three goods trains collided in the smoky darkness and burst into flames. At this time, the Midland Railway, as yet without its own London terminus, was using the G.N. main line into Kings Cross, and the accident therefore strangled traffic in and out of the City by this route for several days until the wreckage was cleared. Some Midland trains from Kettering used the L.N.W.R. line into London, and other traffic, such as newspapers, was routed via the G.E. line to Cambridge and then over the newly-opened track through Huntingdon and Kettering.

Although the Kettering Temperance Society excursion apparently did not materialise, the new line did carry quite a number of special trains throughout its first summer of operation. In June, Midland Railway advertisements featured in the local press offering "Tourist Tickets" from Cambridge and Huntingdon to a large number of resorts throughout England, Scotland and Wales (and even the Isle of Man); at the end of July a train of 20 carriages brought visitors to Huntingdon for the Races; and on a wet and windy day in August a party from the Baptist Sunday School at Godmanchester visited Matlock. This incidentally seems to have been a favourite resort, and there were a number of excursion trains, most of them heavily laden, which originated from the Kettering-Huntingdon line, such as that on 2nd August which picked up at Kimbolton at 6.35 am, and went from there to Raunds, Thrapston, Twywell, Cranford, Kettering and Market Harborough, reaching the Derbyshire resort at 10.20. First Class fare for the full distance was 7/-, which included, said the advertisement, "admission to the Rutland and Devonshire Caverns, Heights of Abraham, and Prospect Tower at Matlock". The return train left at 5.45 pm.

A few months after the line's opening came a Boardroom incident which spread ripples of discord among some of the directors. As far back as February 1864, Valentine Hill, as representative of the Duke of Manchester, had been invited to join the Board, an invitation he had readily accepted, carrying out his duties as far as can be ascertained in a conscientious and responsible way for the next two and a half years. On 13th August 1866, however, Arthur Lankester, Secretary of the K.T.&H.R., wrote a curious letter on behalf of Mr Waring, the line's contractor, stating that the latter "has begged me to ask you to retire in favour of one of his brothers, Mr Pain retiring in favour of himself."

Waring had said that this apparent take-over by his family, who would then have two-fifths representation on the Board, was entirely justified "considering that their interests are commensurate with almost the entire capital of the Company". Hill apparently agreed to resign immediately, since two days later Lankester is writing to him again, referring to the "kind manner in which you have consented to withdraw from the Direction in his (Waring's) favour". But not everyone was happy at the way the composition of the Board had been changed overnight. General Arbuthnot, who had been abroad on government business at the time, returned in September to hear of the request for Hill's resignation, which he described in a letter to Hill as "a most unusual proceeding", and pointedly dissociated himself from the whole affair. Hill spent almost three years away from direct involvement in the railway's affairs, but some sort of reconciliation or compromise was eventually reached in that he was, in June 1869, asked by Waring himself to return to the Board, which he did.

Although the 1862 Prospectus for the Kettering & Thrapstone Railway had optimistically forecast that "assuming the receipts per mile at the lowest rate yielded by any railway in the kingdom", profits from the working of the line "cannot fail to give the Shareholders 5 per cent" at least, this optimism was badly misplaced. A shareholders meeting in February 1867 was told that the first half-year's operation had grossed only £5,086, which after the Midland Railway had taken its 40% cut, and other expenses such as interest, rent and wages had been deducted, left a mere £636 11s 7d, making it impossible to pay any dividend at all.

There had been only a slight improvement by the next meeting, June 1867, with receipts reaching £5,135 15s 3d, but a dividend of 2% was paid out this time, presumably with the feeling that shareholders would not relish a further lack of return on their capital. The directors however were still not happy at the state of affairs, and although they partly blamed the country's general trade recession for the "very insignificant" receipts, they did make specific complaints about the coal traffic, which was not being routed along the line in the quantity forecast, and about the passenger services, which needed some rethinking and alteration.

The next year showed dividends of 2% and 2½% declared at half-yearly intervals, but profits remained very small, and the line was obviously existing only precariously. The directors were critical of their parent Company, the Midland Railway, which while taking its share of the profits, was not they felt doing enough to stimulate traffic along the Kettering-Huntingdon branch; the statement of accounts ending June 1868 said, rather pessimistically:

"Notwithstanding the increase in the receipts shown in the accounts, the results of the traffic over your railway continue very far below the level of what they ought to be, looking at its connection with two such systems as the Midland and Great Eastern, and the Directors trust that

with the revival of trade, the Midland Company will be induced to meet the wants of the district more effectively by affording additional passenger accommodation, it being evident that the passenger traffic cannot be fairly developed without increasing the trains and fixing them at more convenient hours than at present; and moreover, that they will assist this Company in obtaining the share of the Coal traffic properly belonging to your railway, as being the shortest and most direct route to the Eastern Counties."

The problem was compounded by the fact that the last two dividends to shareholders had in fact been withheld because of a dispute with the Midland Railway Company over payment for completion of the line. The original contractors for the route, Waring Brothers, had apparently not carried out their part of the work to schedule, and since the agreement had been that this work was to be completed to the satisfaction of the Midland Railway, the latter Company had taken over the job and was now pressing for payment, threatening to retain the total earnings of the line until the account was settled. Some angry correspondence was stirred up by this action, such as the private letter from John Seath, the Auditor for the K.T.&H.R., to Valentine Hill, suggesting that an influential shareholder such as Hill should complain to the Company Secretary about the affair, indicating that he felt it to be "perfectly monstrous that the shareholders should have their dividend withheld because the Contractors did not carry out their engagements." Whether Hill did write as suggested, I have been unable to discover, but things were eventually resolved, if not to everyone's total satisfaction, at least in a workable compromise.

Passenger services continued to cause some problems. Over the first eighteen months passenger receipts had been running at about one-third of total revenue, but by the middle of 1868 they had dropped to a quarter. The comment from the Directors' statement of June 1868 about fixing the times of passenger trains "at more convenient hours than at present" has already been quoted, and some attempts were made at re-timing: the first morning train from Cambridge, for example, was scheduled to leave earlier, with the consequent dramatic effect of almost doubling the number of passengers using it (although it did not suit the Duke of Manchester, who wrote to the Midland Railway complaining vociferously, but to no avail).

The Duke, this time supported by the Earl of Sandwich, was putting pen to paper again a few months later, indicating that he felt distinctly unhappy about the passenger services offered by the branch line, and that having supported the Company for so many years he was aggrieved at the "unusually small number of trains, and that these are so arranged that through accommodation from places beyond Kettering and Huntingdon on the Eastern Counties Railway positively does not exist." This was a serious fault, since the establishment of a through link between the Midlands and the east was the main feature of the line's original

promotion, and one which was calculated to generate the traffic necessary to make the route a viable proposition. In his reply to the Duke, George B. Townsend, one of the Company solicitors, suggested that the peers should write a letter of complaint to the Midland Railway; adding to his suggestion a sentence which throws a revealing light on the social hierarchy of the time: "I have no doubt it will have a good effect, as there is nothing the Midland Coy. pay such respect to, as the opinions and wishes of Peers." It would seem, however, that the Midland was not quite as obsequious as Mr. Townsend assumed, as a couple of other pieces of correspondence on another topic clearly indicate.

Although the large landowners of the area had given their support to the line, and had been willing to sell the necessary land for railway development, centuries of inherited aristocratic privilege died hard, and there was a tendency among certain landed gentry to regard railway property as still peculiarly their own. At the end of 1864, while the line was being built, Valentine Hill had been in correspondence with the Company with a request that a clause should be inserted in the agreement concerning the sale of land, authorising the Duke of Manchester to stop passenger trains at Kimbolton station for his own convenience whenever he felt like it. Politely, General Arbuthnot had to inform him that the railway timetable was a carefully structured piece of organisation, and that unscheduled halts could produce the risk of rear-end collision from following trains being unaware of the stoppage (this, remember, was before the time of obligatory "lock and block" signalling arrangements, when trains were often separated from each other simply on a time interval basis). The Duke, however, seems not to have been satisfied that he should be subject to the same rules of procedure as other people, and the correspondence rumbled on for some months, eventually being ended in April 1865 by a firmly-worded letter from the Company Secretary Arthur Lankester stating that the Company would be happy to oblige the Duke "by ordering a train to be stopped at any time on application being made . . . for that purpose beforehand, but that it is contrary to the regulations of the service to bid the Company to grant such a privilege as a matter of course by a clause in a legal document."

A second incident concerning ducal privilege occurred in April 1867, when several members of the local Hunt, considering that the pursuit of the fox took precedence over trespassing on railway property, burst through gates and fences bordering the line near Kimbolton. One gentleman proceeded to ride for half a mile along the track in blissful disregard of any approaching trains, eventually meeting a platelayer who, in the words of the Railway Company's letter about the incident, "remonstrated" with him; the gentleman's reaction to being accosted by this grimy worker was to threaten to horsewhip him. Soon after, brisk correspondence was exchanged between Valentine Hill and the Midland Railway's manager, James Allport, the former opening the campaign

with the complaint that members of the Hunt had been prevented by an employee of the railway from going along the line "to their considerable inconvenience". Allport was at first propitiatory, reminding Hill that although there was "some danger" attached to wandering about on railway tracks, he would give directions "for no unnecessary obstacles to be thrown in the way of the gentlemen engaged in the Hunt", and hoped that in future Hill would find "every facility afforded". The Duke's agent wrote again a few days later (the letter is not extant, but the content can be gauged from Allport's reply), evidently pressing for some action to be taken against what was considered the insufferable impertinence of the platelayer, and it was at this point that Allport abandoned tactfulness and launched into a counter-attack, pointing out that the man was only doing his job; that the Hunt had on several occasions done "a good deal of mischief" to the railway's fences and gates; and that such parties should in future exercise more caution when crossing running lines. As to the horse-whipping gentleman's grievance, Allport was curtly dismissive: "I think you will agree with me that the ground for complaint is not on his part, but on that of the Company"—a salvo which evidently closed the whole affair.

Chapter Two

GENERAL OPERATION

The pattern of four trains a day each way, inaugurated by the 1866 timetable, showed no expansion as the line established itself over the next few decades. The only appreciable difference was that the journey time was quicker, with all trains covering the distance between Kettering and Cambridge in around two hours or less, as against the two and a half hours taken by the four Parliamentary trains a day in 1866 (the four other trains in that first timetable had also taken less than two hours, but only because they made no stops at eight of the line's fifteen stations). Goods services soon fell into the predictable pattern of most rural lines, with agricultural produce such as corn, hay, wheat, fruit and vegetables, together with livestock such as cattle, pigs and sheep, being taken out, and manufactured goods, coal, fertilisers and so on being brought in. The ironstone workings which prompted the promotion of the first stretch of line in the early 1860s were extensively developed throughout the second half of the century and provided a considerable proportion of the line's goods traffic and therefore of its revenue. By the time the line opened, quarries were already in existence around Woodford, Twywell and Islip, and in 1873 further workings were opened up west of Cranford and at Thrapston. The early 1880s saw mining spread to the east of Cranford station, around Burton Latimer, and even briefly at Raunds, so that during the last two decades of the century virtually the whole of the area bordering the railway line between Kettering Junction and Thrapston station was a mass of mines, quarries and excavations, bringing with them an impressive mileage of tramways, light railways and standard gauge sidings, frequently connecting with the main line. Heavy trains of ironstone bound for the North and Midlands were a familiar sight as they struggled to restart on the adverse gradients, heading towards Kettering Junction, often under the charge of MR 2-4-0s or 0-6-0s designed by Kirtley and Johnson (one or two of the Johnson 0-6-0s, in their 1917 rebuilt form, survived in use on the line until its last years).

Although the ironstone was to provide a staple goods traffic for many years, some of the other goods traffic which might have used the Kettering-Huntingdon line as a useful cross-country link between the Midlands and the eastern counties (which, it will be remembered, had been the function of the line as first envisaged) was diverted away from this route as a result of further railway building in the late 1870s between Kettering and Nottingham. The history of the Manton cut-off line, as it came to be known, needs to be considered briefly here, since its effects on the Huntingdon line were quite far-reaching.

In the early 1870s the G.W.R. and the L.N.W.R made joint proposals to build a line from Nottingham to Market Harborough with the purpose

of extending their influence into Midland territory and capturing some of the traffic offered by Nottingham and its surrounding area, up until now largely the preserve of the M.R. and the G.N.R. As a counter to these proposals, the M.R. and the M.S.&L.R. jointly put forward plans for a line from Nottingham to Glendon, just north of Kettering, where it would make a junction with the Midland main line. In the event, both of these schemes were sanctioned, the G.W.R./L.N.W.R. line being opened in stages between 1878 and 1883, and the rival line in 1879–80. This meant that from 1st November 1879 through goods trains from Nottingham could travel along the new route to Melton Mowbray and then over the existing M.R. Peterborough–Syston line, through Stamford to Peterborough and thence to the eastern counties. In this way, it was possible to avoid the Kettering–Huntingdon line, whose gradients worked adversely against east-bound trains, and which was, of course, also single-track, with all the attendant complications of working. With a new route to the east now available, the M.R. began to direct a certain amount of traffic away from the K.T.&H.R. line, and perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that the seeds of the line's decline were sown even at this early stage, not much more than a dozen years after the opening of the route.

There was an attempt in the latter years of the century to build a line which might have compensated for some of this lost traffic and could have increased traffic along part of the Kettering–Huntingdon route had the project actually come to completion. In the 1880s boot and shoe manufacturers centred on the Northamptonshire towns of Rushden and Higham Ferrers expressed a wish for a railway line to serve their area more directly than the L.N.W.R. branch from Blisworth to Peterborough, which although it passed through Wellingborough, was still an inconvenient distance away. A new line was therefore proposed, known as the Irchester and Raunds branch, which would diverge from the Midland main line at Irchester, just south of Wellingborough, following the Nene valley to run through Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Stanwick, consequently swinging eastwards to join up with the Kettering–Huntingdon line somewhere near the existing Raunds station. This latter was a mile or more from Raunds itself, and it was felt that the new proposed branch could provide the town with a second station sited in a much more central location. The line was authorised in 1890 and with great local ceremony opened to passengers in May 1894 as far as Higham Ferrers; here, however, building stopped for unexplained reasons, and the proposed extension to Raunds was never completed.

Up until now, the K.T.&H.R. had remained a nominally independent concern, although under Midland patronage, but from 1 July 1897, 31 years after its opening, the line was formally absorbed into the direct ownership of the Midland Railway. At the turn of the century, goods traffic on the line continued at a steady rate, notwithstanding the effects

of the Manton cut-off, and there were twenty or more goods trains using the route most weekdays. Traffic was still very mixed, a station like Thrapston, for example, despatching seven or eight truckloads of cattle, sheep and pigs on market days to places like Birmingham or Nottingham, and receiving regular supplies of groceries for local shops. The local iron foundry loaded 10 or 15 tons of metal goods, such as pulleys, nearly every day. In addition to the through passenger trains, there was at this time a local shuttle service between Kettering and Thrapston which often carried up to a hundred people from the latter town on Fridays, Kettering's cattle market day. At the beginning and end of University terms, many undergraduates from Cambridge University travelled by this route to Kettering for connections to other parts of the country, and because of this patronage the line became known as the "Varsity Line".

After the First World War a number of ironstone workings around the eastern end of the line closed down as the ore gave out and quarrying became uneconomical, and with the influence of motor transport beginning to make itself felt progressively through the 1920s and 1930s, branch lines such as this one began to decline in importance. There are signs that at this stage of its existence the line's services became rather erratic at times, and not at all satisfactory to its customers: for example, a local racehorse owner, Mr. William Whitehead of Shelton, near Kimbolton, who used the route frequently, says in his intriguingly-titled book of reminiscences "Tripe and onions" that the line was "the cause of more bad language than any other line in the country", and he is rather scathing about the slack time-keeping of the trains: half an hour's delay in the advertised time, he says, "was not considered of great importance—surprise would have been expressed had the train been on time." This is, of course, only one individual's view, but it is supported by one other commentator in the 1930s, who complained that "This might be a possible route to the North, if the main line connections at Kettering were not so bad, and the journey on the branch not so long."

The line's decline was, however, temporarily arrested by the outbreak of the Second World War, when, in common with all the country's railways, the Kettering–Huntingdon route became heavily occupied with the movement of men and materials essential for the war effort. Trainloads of bombs and ammunition became a regular feature of the branch, since, in 1941, an airfield for the use of R.A.F. bombers had been constructed by W.&C. French Ltd to the north of Kimbolton village. To help with the delivery of materials to the site new sidings were laid down at Kimbolton station and a short distance further east at Stow Longa crossing. Later, as the airfield was turned over to U.S.A.A.F. occupation, additional living accommodation and hard standing for aircraft was built, and the runway extended to 2,000 yards. The first American group at the base was the 91st Bomber Group, which arrived from the States in September 1942, but which was soon moved to Bassingbourn because

the runway at Kimbolton was still too short for the Group's Flying Fortresses. Subsequently, the 379th heavy bomber group of the Eighth Air Force took over, and a regular stream of ammunition trains delivered bombs and aviation fuel to the airfield to supply the many sorties flown over enemy territory. After the war, the airfield reverted for a while to R.A.F. usage; it was then abandoned, and during the spring of 1959, even as the Kettering–Huntingdon line was preparing to close to passengers, a start was made on breaking up the buildings and runways. Over the period 1960–64 the land was sold off in lots, part of it returning to the descendants of the former owner, the Duke of Manchester.

Speaking in the House of Commons in December 1946, Mr. Hugh Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had some harsh things to say about the state of the country's railways in the immediate post-war period:

“This railway system of ours is a very poor bag of assets. The permanent way is badly worn. The rolling stock is in a state of great dilapidation. The railways are a disgrace to the country. The railway stations and their equipment are a disgrace to the country.”

In spite of the inelegance caused by the rather haphazard sequence of Mr Dalton's sentences, one has to admit that there was a considerable measure of truth in what he had to say, and it would take a great deal of effort and money to rebuild and replace stock and property damaged or destroyed by enemy action, and to recoup business which had slowly been slipping away from the railways in the years leading up to the war. The post-war Labour government saw nationalisation of all the country's railways as the only way to ensure an efficient service, and under its proposals, which came into effect on 1st January 1948, the Kettering–Huntingdon line found itself split between two Regions of the new British Railways, the western part of the line as far as Raunds coming under the London Midland Region, and that from Kimbolton to Huntingdon belonging to the Eastern Region.

Although the image of the line had been given something of a boost by the supply of several brand-new Ivatt 2MT engines, delivered in 1946, it is quite clear that in its latter days, the line settled down gently into the role of one of those rather sleepy and not very important cross-country branches, carrying a declining number of passengers and surviving by virtue of its reliance on one staple goods commodity, in this case the still substantial ironstone traffic, although there was also some useful, but by nature seasonal, business provided by the fruit-growing area to the east of Huntingdon; during the fruit season quite large quantities of fruit were loaded at stations such as Swavesey, Longstanton, Oakington and St Ives and carried to Kettering where it was put onto fast early-morning trains for markets in Lancashire towns such as Bolton and Manchester.

The Kettering line really does appear to have been one of those lines

where trains were prepared to wait at stations an extra minute or two to allow late-comers to arrive, and where the station staff had a friendly and avuncular attitude to their patrons, being ready to do small favours in the interests of maintaining local custom. The Northamptonshire author Tony Ireson, for example, tells of the occasion when he set off by car to St Ives on a wet and muddy morning, inadvertently leaving at home his Wellington boots, which he would need later on. His wife, realising his omission, took them to the local station and put them on the next train, sending along a message by telegraph (a facility also offered at the station) to tell her husband to pick them up at the other end, which he accordingly did. On another occasion, Mr Ireson arrived by car at Kettering station, where his wife was to catch a St Ives train, only to find that the train had just left; pausing only to ask the station staff if they could send a message to hold the train at Twywell (where he thought he would be able to catch up with it) he leapt into his car and drove off in pursuit. As it happens, a combination of the train's leisurely progress and Mr Ireson's rather more urgent pace meant that he arrived at Cranford, the station before Twywell, just in time for his wife to board. Unfortunately, Mr Ireson forgot that he had asked for the train to be held at Twywell, and an unusually lengthy halt was made there, with the station staff looking anxiously down the road for any signs of a speeding car, and the train crew, willing but worried, consulting their watches with increasing agitation. At last the driver announced that he was unable to wait any longer, stepped firmly back onto his footplate, and restarted the train. Mrs Ireson, who by now realised what had happened, wisely said nothing!

The line also clearly took on the rural atmosphere of the countryside through which it passed, a string of small villages in the middle of wide open fields studded by woods and copses, with the rivers Nene and Ouse meandering peacefully between grassy banks. Many of the people who worked on the line were local country people, and followed country pursuits: shooting rabbits and pheasants from the footplate of slow-moving goods trains was apparently a favourite sport of some engine crews, it being an easy matter for the fireman to jump down to retrieve any successful kills and then catch up the train a little further on, the Sunday dinner secure under his jacket. One enterprising cottager living near the line profited exceedingly well by his knowledge of this propensity: he had a stuffed rabbit which he used to set up in the hedge alongside the line, knowing that certain train-crews, who did not go so far as to carry shotguns with them, would attempt to down the rabbit by hurling lumps of coal at it; in this way, he successfully supplemented his fuel supply for the winter! The line crossed rivers or backwaters at several points, and the sight of water proved too much for some of the fishermen on the engines; there are stories of crews pausing on a river bridge to set up a number of baited lines which would then be hauled in, hopefully heavy with fish, on the return journey later in the day.

Such an unhurried and bucolic existence has its attractions, of course, but in the harsh economic world of the 1950s, where rail services were faced by increasingly severe competition from other forms of transport, it was clearly becoming more and more untenable.

For Britain's new nationalised industry, freight, especially in bulk, remained good business, particularly in the period immediately after the war when building materials for the repair of factories and 3¼ million bomb-damaged houses were needed all over the country: there was, however, a very decided move away from travel by public transport, especially by rail, and more than anything else in the post-war period it was the increase in private car ownership which seriously damaged the railways' former monopoly on passenger-carrying. With a general increase in the standard of living, more and more people could afford to buy their own family car—in 1956 a new Ford Popular was selling at just over £400—and this, of course, could only have an adverse effect on the railways' revenue. When, in 1963, Dr Beeching produced his survey of Britain's railway system, he drew attention to the way that operating costs had progressively overtaken receipts over the last decade:

“The railways emerged from the war at a fairly high level of activity, but in a poor physical state. They were able to pay their way, because road transport facilities were still limited, and they continued to do so until 1952. From then onwards, however, the surplus on operating account declined progressively. After 1953 it became too small to meet capital charges, after 1955 it disappeared, and by 1960 the annual loss on operating account had risen to £67.7 m.”

By the late 1950s, then, the railway authorities, conscious of the growing need to make economies in order to survive, began to take a careful look at those lines whose revenue seemed to be less than satisfactory, and the continuing existence of the Kettering–Huntingdon route was immediately threatened.

Chapter Three

CLOSURE

In 1958 the Kettering–Cambridge line was the subject of a British Railways viability study, whose results were reported in the local press in the New Year of 1959, with the first indication that the line might well be recommended for closure to passengers, since the study had found that it was used mainly for freight purposes, and that passenger traffic was declining steadily.

A straw in the wind had been the closure of Twywell station for both goods and passenger services in July 1951. Four years later came a recommendation to shut down the small station at Cranford because of the “continual decline” in the number of passengers using its service of four stopping trains a day (one to Kettering and three to Cambridge). It was felt that the existing “excellent” bus service to Kettering was sufficient to cope with any demand for public transport (the average number of rail travellers from the station was only one a day), and local residents and farmers were assured that parcels and freight facilities would remain. The closure proposal went for consideration to the East Midland Transport Users Consultative Committee (TUCC) on 31st January, and on 22nd March it was announced that the station would close as from Monday, 2nd April 1956. On that last day, seven people awaited the 9 am train to Kettering, but were joined at the last minute by another ten who had been unable to find seats on the bus, and who provided unprecedented business for the village station, although the impression of an indispensable and efficient transport service was slightly marred by the fact that the train arrived eight minutes late. The last passenger ticket to be sold from the station was bought by the station-master for his 11-year old daughter, but any thoughts of retaining this relic for sentimental purposes were firmly quashed by the ticket collector at Kettering, who was adamant that all tickets had to go to the audit office at Derby. The station-master himself was not made redundant by closure, but was transferred to Kettering as relief station-master.

It was over the question of what criteria should be used to determine whether a railway line was ripe for closure that private and official opinion was sharply divided. For British Railways, the problem was mainly one of economics, balancing revenue against running and maintenance costs, while for many of the people in the area served by the line the opinion was that economics were secondary to a nationalised industry’s obligation to provide a service for the community. The latter point was clearly made by a Kettering newspaper, which, in its editorial column a week after rumours of closure became public, commented:

“It is a staggering thought that the only consideration is the amount of traffic the line carries, the amount of profit it makes, and the number of passengers it carries. If these figures do not add up to the right



The type of train which worked the line around 1900; 2-4-0 No. 1516 with low-roofed carriages, photographed at Hitchin (F. Moore)

Kettering train arriving at Buckden on 29th June 1933; 2-4-0 No. 221 (R.W. Kidner)

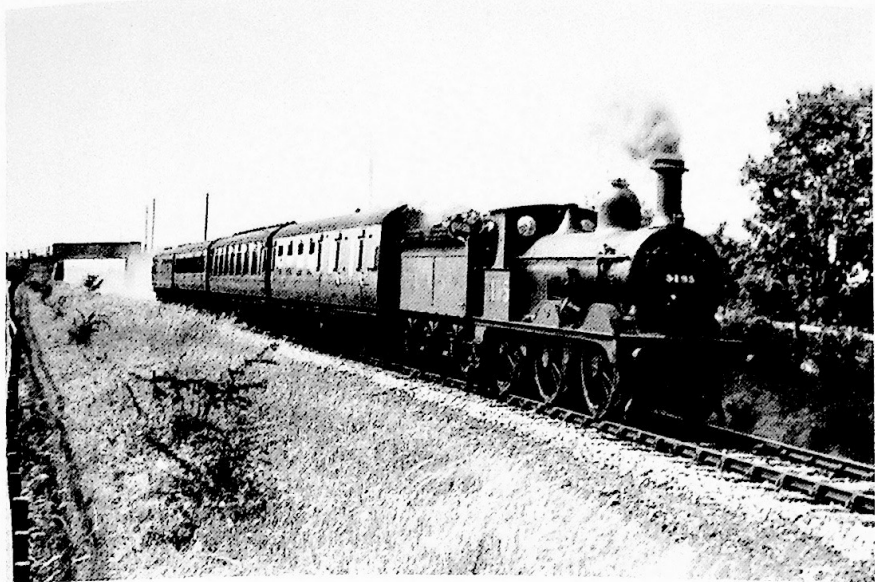




0-6-0 No. 3545 shunting at Buckden on 29th June 1933 (R.W. Kidner)

Train from Cambridge at Kettering on 3rd July 1937; 2-4-0 No. 20012 (H.C. Casserley)





*Cambridge train near Kimbolton on 3rd July 1939; 0-6-0 No. 3195
(H.C. Casserley)*

Thrapston station on 18th July 1958 (H.C. Casserley)





Raunds station looking towards Cambridge, 18th July 1958 (H.C. Casserley)

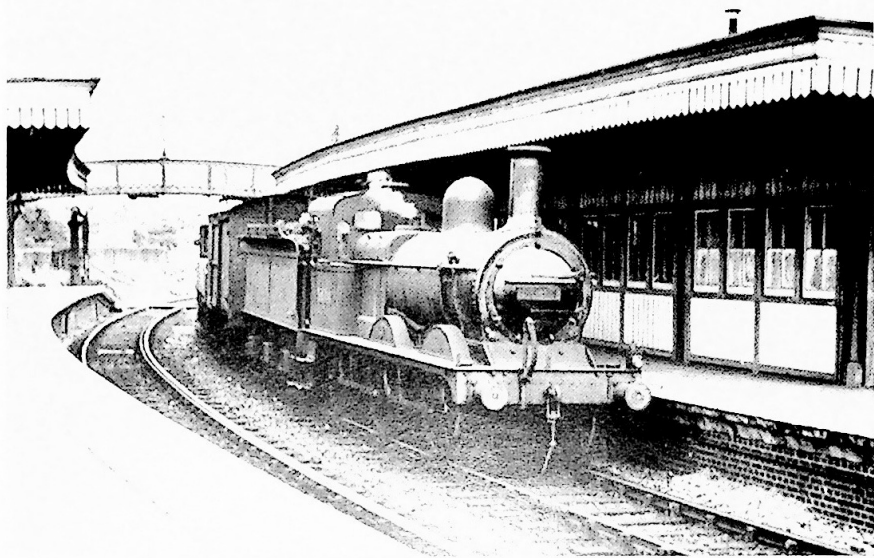
Cranford station (Lens of Sutton)





Godmanchester station (Lens of Sutton)

No. 58214 on goods train leaving Huntingdon East, August 1952 (E.H. Sawford)





No. 65390 leaving Raunds on a Cambridge train (P.H. Groom)

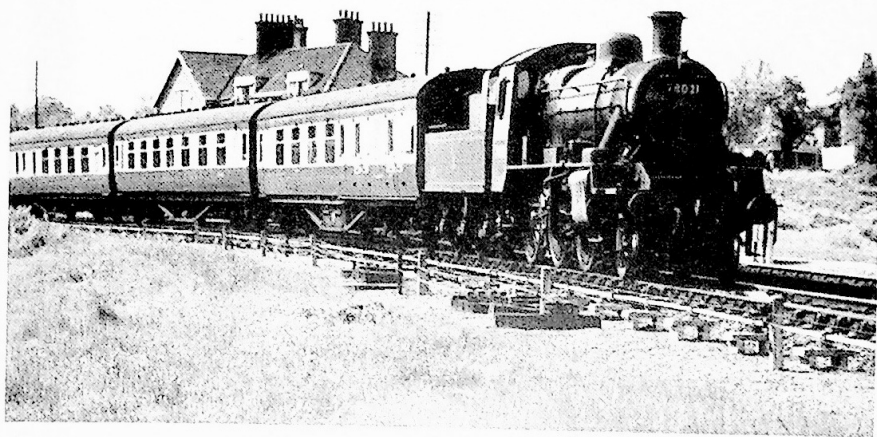
Nos. 46403/4 arriving at Huntingdon East. The first engine will be detached and work an evening fruit train as pilot, to Kettering (E.H. Sawford)





No. 78020 leaving Raunds (P.H. Groom)

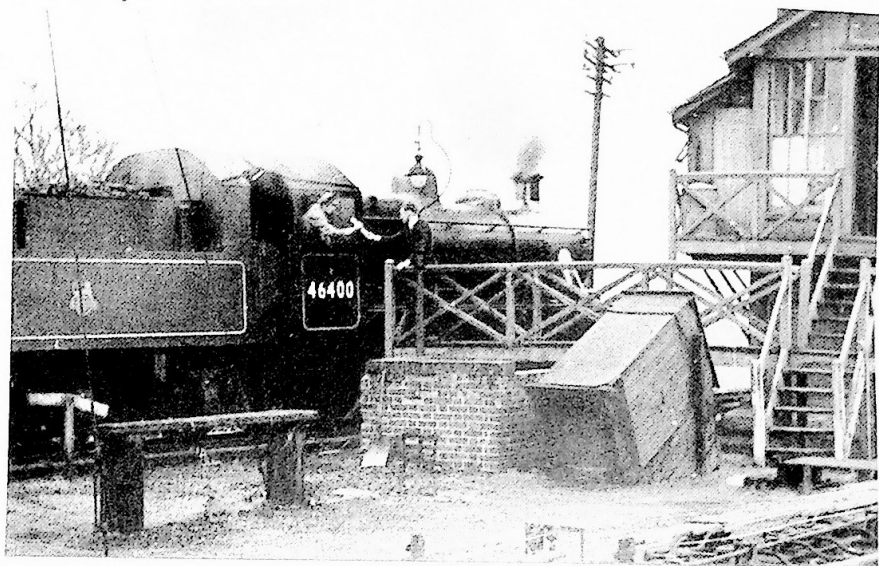
Cambridge train at Huntingdon East on 25th May 1954; 2-6-0 No. 78021 (E.H. Sawford)





No. 46495 climbing away from Thrapston with a Cambridge train (P.H. Groom)

Exchanging staff at Huntingdon East on a Cambridge-Kettering train on 6th May 1952 (E.H. Sawford)





*Ex-GER 0-6-0 No. 65474 at Huntingdon locomotive shed, October 1954
(E.H. Sawford)*

*No. 65457 on the 5.20 to Cambridge at Kettering South on 18th July 1958
(Ken Fairey)*





4-6-0 No. 45660 on Twywell empties near Butlin's siding on 12th May 1965 (Ken Fairey)

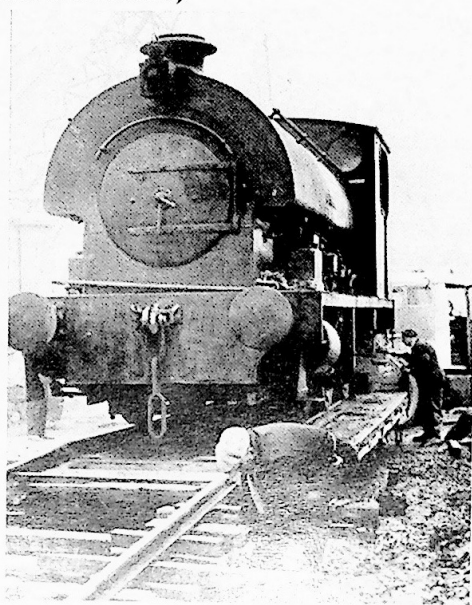
Loading ore at Twywell on 12th May 1965; 4-6-0 No. 45660 ex-Kettering (Ken Fairey)





The crew of the last train at Kettering (Don Neale)

'Cranford No. 2' being loaded for the journey to Overstone solarium, Jan. 1970 (Author's collection)



The last passenger train from Cambridge approaching Kettering on 13th June 1959 (Don Neale)



answer, the line will, one can expect, be closed. Ought not British Railways at this early stage to take into account the inconvenience to this town of 36,000, robbed of its only direct link with Cambridge? Ought they not to consider the value of the line as a link with the East Coast resorts? Ought they not to consider the life and welfare of the villagers along its route?"

On 3rd March 1959 British Railways stated that they were ready to present proposals for closure to the T.U.C.C. "shortly"; three days later the venues for the official inquiries were announced. Since the Kettering-Cambridge line operated over two British Railways areas, the Eastern and the London Midland, two inquiries would be necessary, that covering the East Anglian area of the T.U.C.C. to be held at Liverpool Street station on 14th April, and the East Midlands area at Leicester on 16th April (a more convenient venue at Kettering was originally postulated, but proved not possible). A few rumours about what the closure proposals would entail were in circulation by this time, but all speculation was ended on 20th March when British Railways gave full details of the scheme they would be presenting at the inquiries. All passenger services were to be withdrawn, but freight traffic would be retained between Kettering and Kimbolton, and Huntingdon North and Godmanchester. Two stations, Grafham and Buckden, would be closed down completely, and two sections of track, between Kimbolton and Huntingdon East (10 miles), and between Godmanchester and St Ives (4 miles) would be lifted, thus severing the route as a useful cross-country link.

By the time the East Anglian T.U.C.C. inquiry opened on 14th April, 36 objections to closure had been handed in, including 22 from official bodies. At the hearing, two points quickly emerged around which opposing arguments would crystallise: the potential passenger traffic available to the line, and the provision of adequate alternative public transport if the route were closed. Mr W. J. Thorpe, British Railways' traffic manager for the line, was convinced that there were not enough people willing to use the railway to make it economically viable to keep the line open. Introducing the cheaper diesel units in place of steam-operated services (an argument put forward strongly by supporters of the route, since diesel units could be run for about a third of the cost of a steam locomotive) would be of no use, he maintained; diesels were "not a universal cure", and would only prove their value in areas where there was good traffic potential, which was not the case with the Kettering-Cambridge line (British Railways, had, in fact, considered a diesel service for this line in late 1958, but had eventually decided against it). Another factor was that over the next five years a considerable sum of money, estimated at £287,000, would have to be spent on track renewal (a total of 10 miles was due for renovation), signalling, and repair work to bridges. Immediate closure of the line would obviate the need for this expenditure, in addition to which another £76,400 would be saved in

running costs and wages.

A representative of St Ives Council alleged that the poor passenger traffic was a consequence of the poor service offered by British Railways, acidly describing some of the locomotives and rolling stock used on the route as "next in line for the British Museum". This was a point reinforced by a spokesman for Huntingdon Council, who reminded his audience that an additional and more efficient "experimental" train service had recently—and grudgingly—been provided between Huntingdon and London after years of negotiation with British Railways; in spite of the latter's pessimism, the service had become well-used, and was now to be retained, an operation which he felt could well be repeated with the threatened branch line.

Inevitably, some of the same arguments were reiterated at the East Midlands area inquiry at Leicester two days later, on 16th April. The opponents of closure maintained again that, as the shortest route to Cambridge, the line provided an essential service for people who used it (an average of 47 per weekday from Kettering, and 108 on Saturdays). In addition, it was well-patronised in the summer for holiday services to the east coast; and for a place like Thrapston was a vital factor in attracting light industry to the town. The alternative rail route to Cambridge via Bedford was longer and more inconvenient, involving a change of stations from Bedford Midland to St Johns, which were situated a mile from each other. A bus journey between Kettering and St Ives would take over two hours, considerably longer than by train, and involved two intermediate changes, at Thrapston and Huntingdon. (It is rather ironic that a current British Railways advertising campaign was using the slogan "Outings by train give you longer at your destination").

British Railway's Cambridge traffic manager was able to score some decisive points in the statistical war of passenger figures, since he drew attention to the pitifully small number of people using Thrapston station for summer holiday services: seven during June, eight in July, sixteen in August and eighteen in September. In addition, figures clearly indicated that the line was no longer very important locally, since most of the people mentioned above as travelling from the Kettering end of the route were through passengers, using Kettering for connecting services.

A local journalist, "Newsman" of the *Hunts Post*, reporting the East Anglian inquiry, which he attended and which he found "far from being fair and unbiassed", was sceptical about the T.U.C.C.'s ability or willingness to consider the point of view of the many individuals who were there to protest against the closure. In his opinion, the Committee seemed obsessed by the fact that closure would save an annual wages bill of £76,400, and did not allow any other considerations to affect their final judgement. To support his contention that the T.U.C.C.s were bound to favour British Railways policies, "Newsman" pointed out that "the general public has no say in appointments to the committees, and the

committees are so closely tied to the policies of the Railways and the British Transport Commission that they are worthless as independent investigators."

Independent or not, the Committees made their recommendations for closure, and these were passed on to the Minister of Transport for consideration and final judgement. There was a last-ditch attempt by Huntingdonshire County Council to reverse what looked by now an inevitable decision when in mid May they sent a deputation to see their local M.P., David Renton, carrying statistical evidence which they felt had not been given due weight at the recent inquiries. British Railways' estimate of £33,000 a year as the cost of repairs for the stretch of line between Kettering and St Ives had not, they pointed out, been sufficiently offset by the realisation that total receipts for the line (passenger and goods) were £42,850 per annum; nor did they believe that the large sums of money (£287,000 over five years) for renewal of permanent way and bridges was necessary. They reminded Mr. Renton that that amounted to £8,600 per mile on a stretch of track which had recently been relaid on concrete sleepers, and whose bridges had recently been retimbered; the fact that there was no speed limit imposed over these bridges indicated that British Railways certainly did not consider them to be weak structures. (In fact if diesel units were introduced on the line, repairs would be even less urgent, since they were considerably lighter than steam locomotives.) Such arguments however made no impression on those responsible for decision-making, and on 26th May came the expected announcement that closure of the line for passenger services had been confirmed, to take effect from Monday, 15th June 1959.

In fact, the last trains actually ran on the previous Saturday, 13th June, the event being marked in only a modest way by the number of people who bothered to turn out to watch or ride. The last west-bound trip from Cambridge, made by Class 2MT 46496 with driver Frank Maxey and fireman Dave Freeman, arrived in Kettering at 6.30 pm. The engine was liberally daubed with chalked messages: a scholarly hand was evident in the Latin inscription "Pro Bono Publico" on the tender; "Brian's Folly", a tart reference to Sir Brian Robertson, chairman of the British Transport Commission, adorned the cabside; and the sentimental "Farewell Varsity Line" was scribbled on the front of the smokebox. On the smokebox top was written "Don't you rock me Daddy-O", a reminder of the Lonnie Donegan hit song of a couple of years earlier, and perhaps a cryptic reference to the rough riding of the branch trains! The last eastward journey, made by the 8.10 pm Kettering-Cambridge service, saw twenty or so well-wishers wave off Class 2MT 46467 and its 150 passengers from Kettering's bay Platform 1. The usual complement of two coaches had been doubled for the occasion, and the carriages were scrawled with the by now almost obligatory slogans, such as the sarcastic "British Railways modernisation scheme" and "Travel by bus". Toilet-

paper streamers fluttered from door handles. During the train's brief pause at Thrapston Midland station (where the platform edges had been specially whitened in tribute), a unique tape recording, later pressed into a gramophone record for private issue, was made by Wally Jacques, a Thrapston resident who was there to see his family off on the return trip to Kimbolton. As passengers boarded the train, there were cheers and shouts; the carriage doors slammed, the guard's whistle shrilled, and, with a hiss of steam and a whistled reply (sounding slightly strangled) the engine got its four coaches on the move, wheels slipping momentarily as it tackled the gradient towards Raunds. (There was, incidentally, a peculiarity about some of the last tickets issued from Thrapston station on this final day, since, for some reason, the 1/10 3rd Class return tickets to Kimbolton had been printed as issued from Thrapston Bridge Street, a station serving the former L.N.W.R. line from Northampton to Peterborough). About 50 people greeted the train at Huntingdon East station, and driver Chris Easy and his fireman Peter Brown had the satisfaction of completing their last journey on time as they brought the train into Cambridge, although Mr E. B. Powley of Grafham, an inveterate campaigner against closure, who rode on the footplate as an observer, wryly described the ride as "good for the liver".

Less than a year after closure, there was brief excitement when, in April 1960, the diesel-hauled Blue Pullman appeared on the Kettering–Huntingdon line. This train, intended to pioneer a new type of inter-city service, with a combination of high speed and luxury travel, was the brain-child of H. P. Barker, a part-time member of the British Transport Commission, and was conceived along the lines of the Trans-Europ-Express trains currently being developed on the continent as an answer to severe competition from international airline services. It was due to have gone into service in February 1960, but was so far still earning no revenue: B.R. were tight-lipped about the reasons for the delay, and curtly informed a local newspaper reporter who requested a look inside the train that the whole project was "secret" and open to no-one outside official circles. The train spent some time at Kimbolton station, where a number of publicity photographs were taken, but any hopes that its presence might herald some reinstatement of passenger services on the branch were promptly squashed by a British Railways spokesman, who insisted that the unit was merely on test along the route, having been transferred there from the London–Nottingham line, where it had also been tested over the last few months. The Pullman units did enter service some little time later, and by 1966 were operating on three different routes, although they all quietly disappeared from the scene during the early 1970s.

The Kettering–Kimbolton stretch of line was also used in August 1962 by a Craven 2-car D.M.U. (M50393 and M56147) for crew-training purposes prior to these vehicles going into operation on the Kettering–Corby–Melton–Nottingham route.

In spite of the fact that the line had now been demoted to freight only, the track continued to be maintained to a good standard, with a lot of permanent way work being done throughout the summer of 1960. This period also saw the annual visit of the weed-killing train, one of four special trains operating in the London Midland Region from April to August. Hauled by Class E4 2-4-0 locomotives, the trains consisted of sleeping and dining quarters for the Stoke-on-Trent crews, plus water tenders and containers for 200,000 gallons of a new chemical being tried out for the first time. This concoction, called simazine, could be sprayed from six nozzles simultaneously while the train travelled at 25 mph.

The track was thus efficiently kept clear for the passage of the daily goods trains which still used the route. A typical working from Kettering at this time would involve a train of a dozen or so empty iron-ore tippers and half-a-dozen loaded coal wagons, the former begin dropped off at Cranford, and the latter delivered to Thrapston, Raunds and Kimbolton. On the return journey, empty wagons from previous workings, together with wagons of sand from Thrapston pits (used mainly by British Railways themselves for permanent-way work), supplemented the loaded ore tippers picked up from Cranford.

Although the T.U.C.C. inquiries had not anticipated any real problems for people seeking alternative public transport after the withdrawal of the passenger train service, there were growing complaints that the standard of the substitute bus services had deteriorated during 1960, so that by the beginning of 1961 a bus journey between Kettering and Huntingdon involved a $\frac{3}{4}$ -hour wait at Thrapston, lengthening the journey time to $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours (the train used to take about an hour). By now, however, there were six million private cars registered in Great Britain (double the 1954 figure), and the number of people who needed to use public transport was fast declining to the point where the former ideal of catering for the convenience of the customer wherever possible was becoming a hopelessly uneconomic practice.

In July 1961 ten miles of track, between Kimbolton and Huntingdon and St Ives and Godmanchester, were lifted, as had been stipulated in B.R.'s original plans for the modification of the line, and the route thus ceased to be a cross-country link, becoming instead a long siding from Huntingdon to Godmanchester and a 16-mile branch from Kettering to Kimbolton. At the same time, British Railways issued a proposal to close down goods services at Cranford (a move which would save the princely sum of £9 a week manning expenses), since alternative freight facilities were available at Kettering, a few miles away. No objections were raised to this proposal, and it was put into effect a few months later, the station closing down for good on 6 November.

This seems to have been the prelude to final moves for the closure of the whole of the remaining route, and over the next couple of years services were gradually reduced. Throughout this time, the condition of the line deteriorated, particularly over the severe winter of 1962-3, when, for

example, traffic was held up for some time following the collapse of a large section (30' long and 6' wide) of the road bridge at Brook Street, near Raunds, due it was thought to frost damage. It became clear that the point had been reached when money was no longer going to be made available for the upkeep and repair of what was now a lightly-used route, and it came as no real surprise when it was announced that from Monday, 28th October 1963 the freight service between Kettering and Kimbolton would be withdrawn, leaving only the Twywell ore traffic.

In the following summer, track-lifting gangs moved in to take up the ten miles of track between Kimbolton and Twywell. Two lifting machines were employed on the line, every day raising enough redundant rails to fill a 33-wagon train, which then conveyed the metals, cut into 15' lengths, to various locations to be sent away as scrap. Thereafter, the truncated branch sank into an inevitable decline, with just a couple of goods trains a day disturbing the peace of Cranford village and Twywell's deserted station for a short time. There was one last moment of glory in July 1965, when the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh made a tour of a number of towns in the area, including Kettering, Wellingborough, Northampton and Higham Ferrers; the Royal Train, on which they travelled to Kettering, was during the two days of the visit stabled overnight in Butlins Sidings, being double-headed there by two steam locomotives.

The iron ore and concentrate traffic was sufficient to prolong the life of the branch for some years more, well into the 1970s. As was mentioned earlier in the book, a number of quarries closed during the 1920s, including Twywell, which ceased operations in 1922, and from 1952 the area had reverted to farmland; modern machinery now available, however, had eliminated the problems of removing overburden which had been the cause of the earlier closure, and the quarries had reopened, with a traffic of 5,000 tons a week being moved by rail via Leicester to the South Durham Steel & Iron Co. Ltd's blast furnaces at West Hartlepool and Middlesbrough. Although the ore workings at Cranford came to an end in 1969, business at Twywell continued to flourish, and even increased for a time after additional traffic had been transferred here from the defunct Higham Ferrers line in November 1969. Soon, however, this traffic too declined, until by the early 1970s only a single diesel-hauled train a day visited the loading dock at Twywell, on its way passing the renovated station house at Cranford, sold by British Railways in 1969 for £5,250 and now converted to a private dwelling; similar preservation was in store for the small house at Twywell station in the following years.

With the closure of Cranford quarries, a number of the industrial locomotives which once worked there were transferred into the hands of private preservation schemes. An early removal was the Manning-Wardle 0-6-OST "Sir Berkeley", built in 1890 to the orders of Logan and Hemmingway, contractors for the M.S.&L.R. Derbyshire lines and London Extension construction; having then gone to Cranford, it worked

for many years there until it was retired in 1964, eventually being taken to the Keighley & Worth Valley line in West Yorkshire. Restored and renovated, it had its greatest moment of glory in August 1975 when it appeared at Shildon among the locomotives assembled to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

A similar rescue operation was mounted on the small 2' gauge 0-4-0ST "Pixie", built in 1919 by Bagnall's, which had worked on the Staveley Minerals Ltd lines at Cranford until 1962. This engine eventually joined the private collection of the Rev. Teddy Boston, who operates the Cadeby Light Railway in the grounds of his rectory in Leicestershire.

In January 1970 two further locomotives were removed for preservation. The Bagnall 0-6-0ST "Loddington No. 2", built in 1941, went into private storage at Hinckley, and another saddle-tank, "Cranford No. 2", was taken to Overstone Park, at Sywell, Northamptonshire, where it was intended to use it as a static exhibit.

With the cessation of the iron concentrate traffic from Twywell, the final remaining stretch of track between there and Kettering Junction was lifted, completing the total closure of the whole Kettering-Huntingdon branch. But even though no track now remains, there are still numerous indications and reminders of the railway's presence, as will be detailed in the final chapter of this book.

Chapter Four

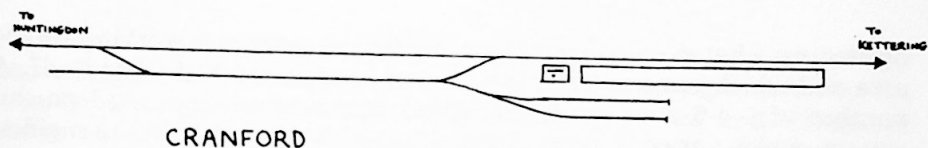
THE ROUTE DESCRIBED

The Kettering, Thrapstone & Huntingdon Railway proper began just over a mile south of Kettering station, with a junction to the east leading off the Slow Goods lines, and usually referred to as Kettering Junction, although official M.R. route maps refer to it as "Cambridge Line Junction" (all distances mentioned in this section of the text are measured from this point, rather than from Kettering station). During the life-time of the Kettering-Huntingdon branch, there were four different signalboxes at Kettering Junction: the first three, situated to the west of the main line, were closed successively in 1879, 1887, and 1934-5, while the final one was given a different site on the opposite side of the tracks and slightly further south, more adjacent to the Cambridge line Junction itself. This move allowed the new box to take over the function of the box at Pytchley, 30 chains onto the branch line proper, and the point at which branch line trains picked up or surrendered the tablet for single-line working: Pytchley box was therefore taken out of service and removed.

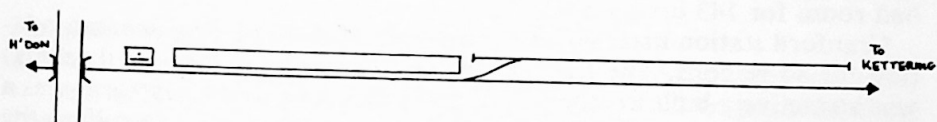
Soon after this point the line crossed water for the first time, by a bridge over the River Ise, and then started to climb steeply at 1 in 70. After 2 miles 9 chains was Butlins Sidings signalbox and the first of the sidings and loading points for the maze of ironstone workings mentioned earlier in the book. In the early 1880s Butlin, Bevan & Co. opened up quarries at nearby Burton Latimer, and a standard-gauge line was laid parallel to the M.R. line, branching into several sidings which connected with the narrow-gauge tramway running south to the workings. By the time quarrying ceased in the 1920s, the network of track was quite extensive, with two tipping docks in use for the transfer of ore from narrow to standard-gauge wagons. The concrete base of one of these docks can still be seen a few yards east of Black Bridge, which carries the minor road to Burton Latimer over the M.R. trackbed. After the iron-ore traffic finished, the standard-gauge sidings were used occasionally for carriage storage, and the signalbox, a 24-lever block post, remained in use until the line's closure, still named "Butlin's Sidings", even though the workings had been taken over by the Burton Ironstone Company as long ago as 1891.

Cranford

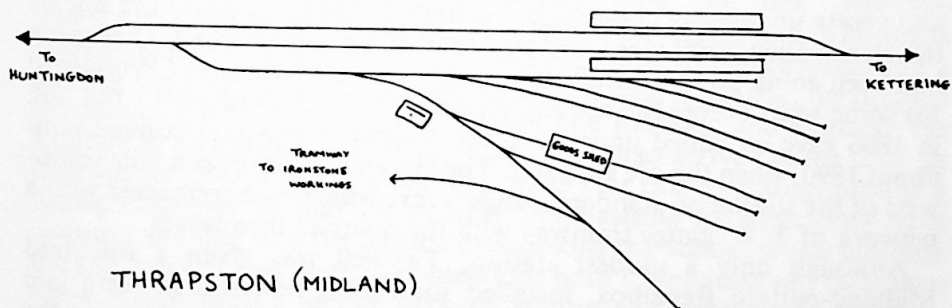
Cranford station was flanked on both sides by ironstone quarries and tramways. To the west, 2 miles 69 chains from Kettering Junction, was the oldest system in the area, a small concern belonging successively to the Cranford Ironstone Co. Ltd., and, from 1908, the Clay Cross Company from Derbyshire, who managed to prolong the life of the quarries until 1921. The original owners, having as they thought exhausted the potential of their site, turned their attention to the east of Cranford station and



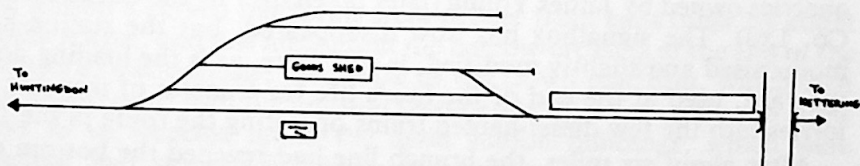
CRANFORD



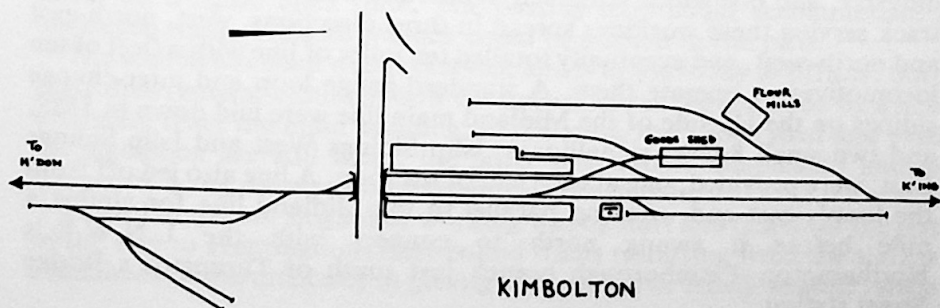
TWYWELL



THRAPSTON (MIDLAND)



RAUNDS



KIMBOLTON

opened up what eventually became the largest opencast workings in the area and which remained in operation as long as the M.R. line itself. A number of 0-4-0 and 0-6-0 saddletank locomotives were used on this system, which varied in gauge from 2' to 4' 8½"; one of these engines, the Avonside six-coupled "Cranford", had a cut-down cab to allow it to negotiate the restricted bore of the tunnel driven under the Kettering-Thrapston road. The sidings ranged alongside the main line had room for 143 ore wagons.

Cranford station itself possessed a goods loop and siding accommodation for 30 wagons. The station-house (now used as a private dwelling) was attractively built in stone, and at the east end of the platform was a small signalbox, in effect a covered ground-frame, for controlling the station loop.

Twywell

From Cranford, the line wound through a couple of miles of wooded and gently undulating countryside, dropping gradually down the side of the Nene valley, until it reached the small station at Twywell. Quarrying had been going on in a desultory way at the nearby village of Woodford for some years before the railway arrived, but the provision of a rail link in 1866 gave an added impetus to the workings, which continued until about 1890, when the ore gave out. The system ran for over a mile south-west of the station on standard-gauge track, which then connected with a network of 2' 6" gauge tramway with the quarries themselves.

Although only a modest station, Twywell was given a full-sized Midland-pattern signalbox, installed soon after new sidings were laid down in 1906 to the east of the roadbridge near the station and serving the quarries owned by James Young (later taken over by the Cargo Fleet Iron Co. Ltd). The signalbox has now disappeared, but the station-house, modernised and slightly modified, is still there, as is the loading dock in the yard, used at the end of the line's life for transfer of iron ore from lorries into the few diesel-hauled trains operating the route in the 1970s.

After about six miles, the branch line had reached the bottom of the Nene valley, at which point was situated the extensive ironstone workings of the Islip Iron Company, the largest narrow-gauge system in the whole industry, and one which remained in operation until 1952. The 3' gauge track serving these workings spread in three directions, west, north-east and north-west, and eventually totalled ten miles of line with a fleet of ten locomotives to operate them. A standard-gauge loop and inter-change sidings on the Up side of the Midland main line were laid down in 1885, and two small 8-lever signalboxes, Islip Sidings West and Islip Sidings East, were provided, one at each end of the loop. A line also led off from the loop's east end, running parallel to the Midland line for almost a mile before it swung north to connect with the L.N.W.R.'s Northampton-Peterborough branch just south of Thrapston's Bridge Street station.

Even though it no longer exists, such an extensive system of tramways and workings has left numerous traces behind, and exploration of the area lying alongside the main road between Twywell and Thrapston shows brick-built sheds originally used for railway purposes, large patches of open ground where sidings were laid, and various scars and cuttings in the hillside through which at one time narrow-gauge trains of loaded ore wagons clanked and trundled their way down to Islip Sidings.

Thrapston (Midland Road)

After leaving Islip, the main line faced the climb out of the river valley to the higher land to the east, and the approach to Thrapston Midland Road station was made up a 1 in 130 grade which carried the line on a girder bridge over the L.N.W.R. branch and then across the lazily sinuous River Nene by a handsome nine-arched brick viaduct, which still dominates the southern part of the town. Another girder bridge (demolished in the summer of 1982) took the line over the Thrapston-Denford road and, curving to the right, into Thrapston station, the first of the two stations on the route to be provided with a passing loop for passenger trains. Thrapston was, of course, the original destination of the Kettering and Thrapstone Railway, and although the London & Birmingham (later the L.N.W.R.) had arrived in the town as long ago as 1845, the new Company made sure that its station offered a fitting challenge to that of its rival, emphasising its superiority by a compact site dug into the hillside overlooking the valley. It was not only the rail services that were in contention: both Companies ran their own horse-drawn shuttle service between station and hotel, the L.N.W.R. favouring the Swan, and the Midland the White Hart.

The station's curved platforms were off-set from each other by about half their length, and this meant that the barrow-crossing at the end of the Up platform was opposite the centre of the Down platform, which then had to be provided with the unusual feature of a dip in the centre to allow trolleys to be wheeled up to the main station buildings, which were substantial and stone-built. A small wooden waiting-shelter was the extent of the Up side facilities. Two water cranes were provided, positioned one at each end of the platforms, and supplied from a water tower on a squat brick base. The passing loop could accommodate a 40-wagon train, while 70 wagons could be stabled in the yard.

The station has been well preserved, and is in use today as offices. Both platforms remain, although now connected across the trackbed by a new extension from the main building; in the yard, the goods shed and even the signalbox are still there, the latter now rather dilapidated and in danger of being overgrown by bushes and brambles.

From Thrapston, single-line working was by staff and ticket for the rest of the way to Huntingdon. East-bound trains restarting from the station sometimes found difficulty in getting away in wet or frosty weather, since

they were faced with two miles of 1 in 80 climbing; once the top of the valley ridge was reached, the remainder of the route presented a saw-tooth gradient profile, with a succession of short rises and falls varying from 1 in 394 to 1 in 86.

Raunds

Raunds station was a long way from the town it nominally served, and sat in fields almost totally isolated from any visible population, apart from a scatter of farms and a few cottages. The yard sidings had capacity for 66 wagons, and in the 1880s these were supplemented by a mile-long standard-gauge ironstone line running from the yard loop, south towards Raunds and crossing the road between Raunds and Hargrave by a level crossing before entering excavations in what is now the edge of Raunds town centre. Any hopes of considerable traffic from this source were short-lived, however, and the system closed down after less than two years of operation. At 13 miles 44 chains from Kettering Junction, between Raunds station and Kimbolton, the line crossed the boundary between Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire (now Cambridgeshire), which also marked the division between the Midland and Eastern Regions of British Railways.

Kimbolton

One of the larger stations, Kimbolton had two platforms serving its 17-chain loop and was the second of the passing places on the route. The yard, with its brick-built goods shed, could accommodate 43 wagons, while there was room for another 17 on the Up siding next to the signalbox. This latter siding was later removed, but in 1941 a further four sidings for airfield traffic were laid down to the east of the road overbridge, and they remained until closure.

In November 1862 the *Cambridge Chronicle* had reported that "It is hoped by the inhabitants of Kimbolton that those who have influence will exert themselves to bring the railway as near the town as possible", but in the end, although the station was quite extensive, it was an inconvenient distance from the town itself, and a daily omnibus service, run by George Craddock, was made available to connect with trains. Kimbolton Castle, of course, was the seat of the Duke of Manchester, and the ducal connection is still apparent from the "Manchester Arms" public-house next to the station site, which, together with a few cottages, is the full extent of the immediate population. Although it is nearly 25 years since passenger trains ceased to run along the line, there is still, in nearby Covington village, a road-sign pointing to "Kimbolton Stn."!

A mile and a half further on, at 17 miles 44 chains, was Longstow Goods, which as its name implies was never used as a passenger station, but served the brickworks and local goods traffic of the hamlet of Stow Longa (the site would, in fact, have been a marginally more convenient

location for a passenger station serving Kimbolton, being half a mile nearer than the other). As mentioned earlier in the text, the sidings at Longstow proved valuable during the last war, when they provided accommodation for ammunition trains bringing supplies to Kimbolton airfield.

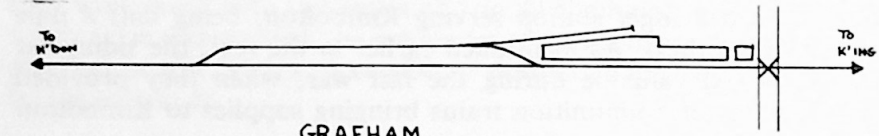
Midway between Longstow and Grafham, the next station, the line crossed the minor road connecting the villages of Kimbolton and Easton, by Magpie Crossing, 19 miles 11 chains from the beginning of the branch. Soon after, the line skirted Calpher Wood, on the Duke of Manchester's estate, and for some years there was a private siding here, used mainly for the loading of timber. The siding would seem to have been installed without Board of Trade sanction, since a private letter from Arthur Kirk at the K.T.&H. Company offices to Valentine Hill in February 1866 states that it would not be laid down until after the line had been passed by the inspectors, since they might "raise difficulties as to the way in which the points were to be unlocked". Apparently the Directors of the railway were more keen on this occasion to accommodate the wishes of the Duke than to comply with expensive and complicated safety procedures.

Grafham

Grafham (spelt "Graffham" until near the end of the century) was only a small station, with a level crossing, a neat station-house and a goods loop serving a single siding into the yard, alongside of which were cattle pens. These were added after the opening of the line, and were the subject of lengthy correspondence between various members of the K.T.&H.R. Board and Valentine Hill who, as the Duke of Manchester's agent, was keen to see provision for cattle handling made at Grafham; letters passed to and fro for a couple of years before the station actually got its cattle dock. Further traffic was generated by the siting of a small brickyard and a coal yard, both belonging to one William Lane, next to the station premises, and the enterprising Mr. Lane also secured a contract as local carrier and coal agent for the Company. Although extended and modified, the station-house survives, still in the communications business since part of it now serves as the village Post Office. The much-chronicled cattle dock also remains in the yard.

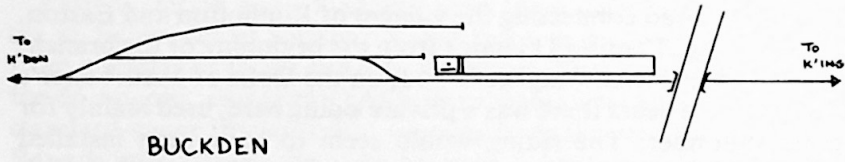
Buckden

The next station, less than 3 miles on from Grafham, was situated almost exactly between the villages of Buckden and Brampton, and it was the latter settlement that gave the station its original designation; this however only lasted a couple of years, and by February 1868 the name had been changed to Buckden. Approaching Buckden, the line passed underneath the Great North Road (A1)—the western arch of the road overbridge is still in position—and, in quick succession, a bridge carrying the A141 into the village. Station facilities were, as at Grafham, limited to a loop and one siding, although Buckden had an additional short spur off



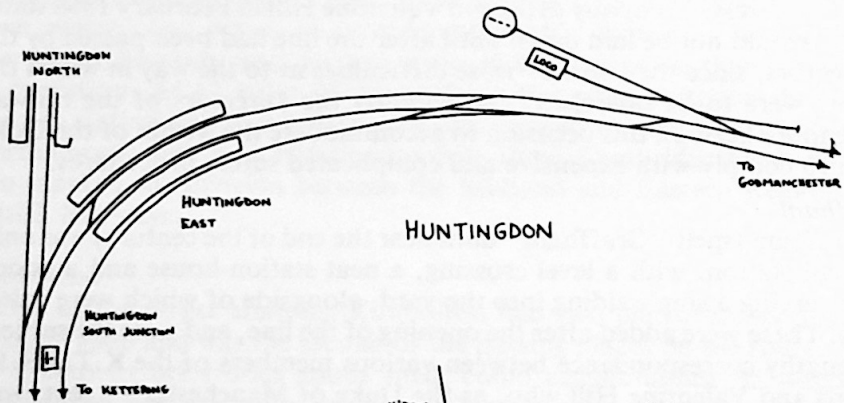
GRAFHAM

TO
K'ING
→



BUCKDEN

To
K'ING



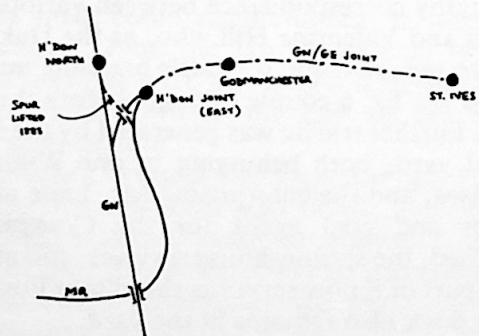
HUNTINGDON
EAST

HUNTINGDON

MURKIN 6000
SOUTH JUNCTION

To KETTERING

16
GODMANCHESTER



Small
Letter
1985

(EAST)

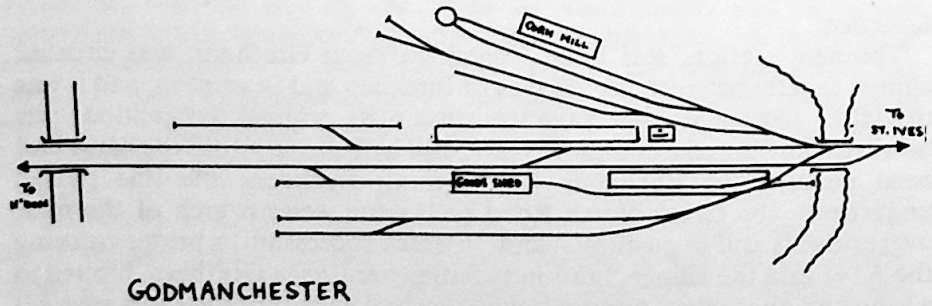
ГОДОВОЙ ОТЧЕТ

ST. IVES

GN/GE JOINT

64

MA



CORN MILL

CONFIDENTIAL

TO
ST. IVES

GODMANCHESTER

the loop to a dock on the platform end.

The station is one of the best preserved along the line, and station-house, complete with clock, and signalbox can still be seen; they do, however, have to be viewed from the flat, since the road bridge over the track has been demolished and the roadway levelled out.

Huntingdon East

Thrusting its way relentlessly from its London terminus towards the north, the Great Northern main line reached Huntingdon in 1850, and from 7th August of that year eight service trains a day each way began to call there on weekdays. Three years earlier the small East Anglian Railway (later swallowed up by the Great Eastern) had pushed out westwards from St Ives to a modest terminal station at Godmanchester on the edge of Huntingdon: with the arrival of the G.N. line the two systems were connected by a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile double-track link running from the south-facing Godmanchester Junction, 13 chains south of Huntingdon (G.N.) station to the East Anglian terminus, which thus became a through station.

The Midland Railway's line came into Huntingdon by a bridge over the River Ouse, across West Meadow, over a minor level crossing (at the approach to which drivers of trains were instructed to whistle), and then burrowed under the G.N. line, swinging sharply left to begin the $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile climb which brought the branch line level with, and parallel to, the East Coast main line just south of Huntingdon North station. At this point there was originally a divergence, the main route curving to the right to connect with the G.E. at Godmanchester, while a short left-hand spur crossed, by a bridge, the G.N./E.A. link line and joined the G.N. line at Huntingdon station.

In the early 1880s extensive alterations were made to track layout and station accommodation at Huntingdon. A new 14-chain double curve connecting the G.N. main line at Huntingdon South Junction and the branch was built in October 1882, replacing the original south-facing junction between the two lines, disused since 1862; at the same time, the north-facing junction spur mentioned above was also lifted, thus severing any direct link between M.R. and G.N.R. lines for east-bound trains except by reversal from Godmanchester. The section of line between Huntingdon and St Ives had, in 1879, come into joint ownership of the G.N. and G.E. Companies, and in 1882-3 a new two-platform Joint station was built on the new curve, with Midland trains using the southern face of the second, island, platform. Passenger services began to use the station from 1st May 1883. A turntable and small engine-shed were installed in 1884-5, and the line between the Joint station and Godmanchester was doubled. The original station at Godmanchester became a goods depot, and a new elaborate station was built and resignalled by August 1884, with extensive sidings serving the dock area and a large corn mill adjacent to the river. At the 1923 Grouping, the Joint

station was renamed Huntingdon East; after the June 1959 closure, it remained open with a very limited Friday-only passenger service for a few more months, finally closing on 18 September 1959, and being completely demolished soon after. The Huntingdon by-pass road now strides across much of the site, although the location of the station curve can be seen from the car park of Huntingdon North station. The site of Godmanchester station is now occupied by a local Council depot; ironically, the oldest of the railway buildings, the EA station-house dating from 1847, has survived longest, and still stands in a cul-de-sac in the shadow of Huntingdon's elevated ring road.

LOCOMOTIVES

This list, which does not pretend to be complete, gives the main locomotive types seen on the route, together with individual numbers of engines known to have worked the branch at particular times.

1. Midland Railway 2-4-0 and 0-6-0 types built to Kirtley and Johnson designs: 2-4-0 221 and 0-6-0 3195 and 3435 in 1933. Three of the Johnson 2F 0-6-0 designs, rebuilt in 1917 with Belpaire boilers, survived to the last years of operation: 58164 (scrapped in the mid-1950s), 58193 and 58214.
2. Ivatt 2MT 2-6-0 introduced in 1946: 46400/01/02/03/04 allocated new to the branch, followed by 46444, 46495 and 46496.
3. J15 0-6-0 (Worsdell design of 1883, modified by Holden), mostly working from Cambridge shed: 65390; 65442; 65451; 65474; 65475. No 65420 was used for tracklifting on the branch in 1961.
4. 8F 2-8-0 (Stanier 48000 class of 1935). Seen mostly on ironstone trains.
5. Standard 2MT 2-6-0 (Derby design of 1953) handled much of passenger traffic in latter years; 78020; 78021.
6. E4 2-4-0 (Holden design of 1891). Only a few of this class were left by the late 1950s, but 62788, fitted with side-window cab, appeared on the branch on a weed-killing train in 1957.

PASSENGER TIMETABLES

March 1866

	Weekdays				Sundays	
Kettering	8.15	11.30	2.50	6.30	9.45	7.30
Cranford	8.30	11.40	3.00	6.45	10.00	7.45
Twywell	8.38	--	--	6.53	10.08	7.53
Thrapston	8.46	11.50	3.10	7.01	10.16	8.01
Raunds	8.56	--	--	7.12	10.26	8.11
Kimbolton	9.11	12.07	3.27	7.30	10.41	8.26
Graffham	9.25	--	--	7.43	10.55	8.40
Brampton	9.34	--	--	7.50	11.03	8.48
Huntingdon	9.47	12.30	3.49	8.03	11.15	9.00
St. Ives	10.02	12.40	4.00	8.16	11.30	9.15
Swavesey	10.12	--	--	8.24	11.40	9.25
Long Stanton	10.20	--	--	8.30	11.47	9.32
Oakington	10.27	--	--	8.36	11.54	9.39
Histon	10.33	--	--	8.43	12.01	9.46
Cambridge	10.45	1.10	4.30	9.00	12.15	10.00
Cambridge	7.45	11.05	3.00	6.15	6.45	4.25
Histon	7.56	--	3.11	6.26	6.58	4.36
Oakington	8.00	--	3.15	6.30	7.04	4.42
Long Stanton	8.07	--	3.22	6.37	7.11	4.49
Swavesey	8.13	--	3.28	6.43	7.18	4.56
St. Ives	8.21	11.34	3.36	6.51	7.28	5.06
Huntingdon	8.34	11.44	3.49	7.04	7.40	5.18
Brampton	8.47	--	4.02	--	7.52	5.30
Graffham	8.55	--	4.10	--	8.00	5.38
Kimbolton	9.11	12.07	4.27	7.30	8.16	5.54
Raunds	9.29	12.22	4.45	7.45	8.33	6.11
Thrapston	9.39	12.31	4.55	7.53	8.43	6.21
Twywell	9.47	--	5.03	--	8.51	6.29
Cranford	9.55	12.45	5.11	8.07	8.59	6.37
Kettering	10.15	1.00	5.30	8.25	9.15	6.55

August 1887

Kettering	8.25	10.57	3.30	7.10
Cranford	8.35	11.07	3.39	7.19
Twywell	8.41	11.13	3.45	7.25
Thrapston	8.46	11.18	3.50	7.31
Raunds	8.55	11.27	4.00	7.38
Kimbolton	9.04	11.36	4.09	7.47
Grafham	9.18	11.48	4.22	7.57
Buckden	9.25	11.55	4.29	A
Huntingdon	9.32	12.02	4.35	8.07
Godmanchester	9.35	12.05	4.38	8.10
St. Ives	9.48	12.18	4.52	8.19
Swavesey	9.56	12.26	4.58	8.28
Long Stanton	10.02	12.32	—	8.35
Oakington	10.09	12.39	5.08	8.43
Histon	10.15	12.45	—	8.50
Cambridge	10.25	12.55	5.20	9.00
Cambridge	7.50	11.30	2.15	5.40
Histon	8.00	—	2.25	—
Oakington	8.06	—	2.31	B
Long Stanton	8.13	—	2.38	5.55
Swavesey	8.19	—	2.44	B
St. Ives	8.26	11.53	2.52	6.06
Godmanchester	8.37	12.03	3.01	6.16
Huntingdon	8.43	12.09	3.07	6.19
Buckden	8.50	C	3.14	6.26
Grafham	8.57	C	3.21	6.33
Kimbolton	9.06	12.26	3.30	6.42
Raunds	9.20	12.38	3.42	6.54
Thrapston	9.26	12.44	3.48	7.00
Twywell	9.35	12.52	3.57	7.08
Cranford	9.41	12.58	4.02	7.14
Kettering	9.50	1.07	4.13	7.24

A Stops by signal to take up, and sets down on the passenger informing guard
 B Stops when required to take up C Stops on Tuesdays when required to take up

Summer 1955

Table 224

KETTERING, HUNTINGDON and CAMBRIDGE

	Week Days only							Week Days only						
	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	pm	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	pm
2081 LIVERPOOL (Can.) dep	10 10	10 10	10 10	7 30	12 30	2 30	8	Cambridge*.....dep	7 57	7 57	11 27	11	4 55	..
2082 MANCHESTER (Can.)	12 8	12 8	12 8	9 10	1 50	4 0	4	Hilton.....	7 54	7 54	11 24	..	5 4	..
2083 DERBY (Midland) ..	8 0	8 15	8 15	12 5	3 5	5 45	6	Oakington.....	7 59	7 59	11 29	..	5 10	..
2271 BIRMINGHAM (N. St.) ..	..	..	..	11 15	4 5	5 10	9	Long Stanton.....	7 44	7 44	11 14	..	5 16	..
2081 KETTERING (L.H.) ..	7 10	7 35	8 14	1 0	4 25	5 40	11	Swavesey.....	7 49	7 49	11 19	..	5 21	..
208 London (St. P.) ..	4 15	4 15	..	11 45	3 15	5 40	14	St. Ives.....	7 57	7 57	11 27	..	5 28	..
Kettering.....dep	8 0	8 33	9 11	2 59	5 25	5 12	19	Godmanchester.....	8 7	8 7	11 27	..	5 35	..
Cranford.....	8 9	8 42	..	2 18	5 54	..	20	Huntingdon (East) H..	8 13	8 13	11 23	..	5 42	..
Thrapston (Mid. Rd.) ..	8 15	8 53	9 29	2 28	6 44	9 27	22	Buckden.....	8 16	8 16	11 26	..	5 49	..
Raunds.....	8 20	9 1	..	2 35	6 52	..	23	Grafham.....	8 23	8 23	11 23	..	5 56	..
Kimbolton.....	8 25	9 10	..	2 40	7 0	..	24	Kimbolton.....	8 34	8 34	11 24	..	6 0	..
Radham.....	8 40	9 15	..	2 54	7 15	..	30	Raunds.....	8 44	8 44	11 24	..	6 16	..
Buckden.....	8 51	9 24	..	3 0	7 27	..	38	Thrapston (Mid. Rd.) ..	8 54	8 54	11 24	..	6 28	..
27 Huntingdon (East) H..	8 59	9 24	10 8	3 7	7 25	9 6	43	Cranford.....	9 49	9 49	..	..	..	..
Godmanchester.....	9 3	9 44	10 6	3 10	6 33	9 8	47	Kettering.....arr	9 15	9 15	..	..	..	..
St. Ives.....	9 18	9 55	10 16	3 20	6 49	9 19	114	2081 LONDON (St. P.) ..	10 45	10 45	11 23	12	8 35	..
Swavesey.....	..	..	..	3 28	6 56	9 25	74	2081 KETTERING (L. Rd.) ..	10 53	10 53	11 45	..	7 57	..
Long Stanton.....	..	..	..	3 31	7 19	30	114	2271 BIRMINGHAM (N. St.) ..	1 9	1 9	11 29	..	4 10	..
Oakington.....	..	..	..	3 7	6 35	104	..	2081 DERBY (Midland) ..	1 19	1 19	11 29	..	4 14	..
Hilton.....	..	..	..	3 12	6 40	165	..	2081 MANCHESTER (C.L.) ..	1 28	1 28	11 28	..	4 11	..
Cambridge*.....arr	9 35	10 30	10 41	3 45	7 22	9 50	190	2081 LIVERPOOL (Can.) ..	9 15	9 15	11 25	..	4 24	..

Arr 9 30 pm on Saturdays Z. Bats. only. Not after 3rd Sept. Z Arr 9 30 am S Arr 10 15 pm on Saturdays
 * See Tables 55 and 204 for alternative service to or from Kettering and beyond, via Bedford. Passengers make their own way between Bedford (St. John's) and Bedford (Midland Road)

8 Stops to set down only
 C Bats. only. Runs 25th June to 10th September
 d Through Carriages from Clacton dep 10 50 am
 F Except Saturdays
 H 100 yards to Huntingdon (North) Eastern Region
 J Friday nights
 K Arr 6 42 pm
 L Through Carriages to Clacton arr 1 15 pm

n Dep 11 34 am on Saturdays
 p Dep 8 30 am on Saturdays
 q pm
 s Saturdays only
 t Dep 10 0 am on Saturdays
 u Arr 4 51 pm on Bats. 2nd July to 10th Sept. (6 49 pm on 18th, 25th June and 17th September)
 v Dep 10 25 pm on Sundays
 w Arr 6 28 pm on Bats. 2nd July to 10th September
 y Runs 18th July to 20th August

	Opened to Passengers	Closed Passengers	Closed Goods	Distance from Kettering Junction
CRANFORD	1 Mar. 1866	2 Apr. 1956	6 Nov. 1961	3m. 27ch.
TWYWELL	"	30 Jul. 1951	30 Jul. 1951	5m. 47ch.
THRAPSTON	"	15 Jun. 1959	28 Oct. 1963	7m. 77ch.
RAUNDS	"	"	"	11m. 6ch.
KIMBOLTON	"	"	"	16m. 11ch.
LONGSTOW GOODS	—	—	1 Jun. 1953	17m. 44ch.
GRAFHAM	1 Mar. 1866	15 Jun. 1959	15 Jun. 1959	20m. 70ch.
BUCKDEN	"	"	"	23m. 44ch.
HUNTINGDON EAST	1 May 1883	18 Sep. 1959	—	26m. 13ch.

Midland Railway

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT STROUD,
ON AUGUST 10, 11, & 12, 1870.

KEIGHLEY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT KEIGHLEY,
ON AUGUST 19, & 20, 1870.

AIREDALE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT BINGLEY,
ON AUGUST 31, 1870.

LANCASTER AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT LANCASTER,
ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1870.

NORTH LONSDALE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT ULVERSTON,
ON SEPTEMBER 9, 1870.

WESTMORELAND AND KENDAL DISTRICT
AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT KENDAL,
ON SEPTEMBER 21, 1870.

STAFFORDSHIRE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY'S SHOW,
AT WALSALL,
ON SEPTEMBER 20, 21, & 22, 1870.

The following Regulations will be observed by this Company with reference to the conveyance of Live Stock, Implements, and Horticultural Specimens to and from the above Shows:—

1. Stock, Implements, and Horticultural Specimens to the Show to be charged full rates.
2. From the Show, if sold, full rates.
3. From the Show, if unsold, to be conveyed free back to the Station whence they were sent at *Owner's risk*, on production of a Certificate from the Secretary of the Show, or an Endorsement under the signature of the Exhibitor, to the effect that they are really unsold.
4. No Hay or Straw will be allowed in the Trucks with Live Stock, but Exhibitors will be permitted to provide for themselves Sand, Sawdust, or Tan.
5. The Carriage of all Live Stock, Implements, and Horticultural Specimens, must be prepaid at the Station from which they are forwarded.
6. Agricultural Machines, Implements, and Horticultural Specimens, carried under these regulations to and from the above Shows, must be invoiced Station to Station at the ordinary rates; delivery to, or collection from the Show Yard, to be performed by, or at the expense of the Owners.
7. Regulations Nos. 1, 2, and 3, as to Cattle and Horses, apply only if the Traffic be conveyed in Cattle Wagons and by Goods Trains.
8. Poultry and Dogs to be charged full rates, both to and from the Show.
9. No reduction in the ordinary rates for Horses or Cattle when conveyed in Horse-Boxes.
10. Parties requiring the exclusive use of a Horse-Box for only one animal, to be charged as for two Horses.

JAMES ALLPORT,

General Manager.

Derby, August 4th, 1870.

A handbill of 1870 which was still pasted into the Buckden station order book in 1933 (R.W. Kidner collection)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to record my thanks to all those people who have helped in any way with the writing of this book, especially the following:

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The staff of the Huntingdon Record Office and Cambridge Newspaper Library;

The librarian of the "Peterborough Advertiser".

J.R.

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